

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
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Understanding the  
**ESSENCE OF  
YOUR MIDDOS**

שיטת  
ארבעת  
היסודות



The Four Elements Teachings  
מאת מחבר הספרים בלבבי משכן אבנה



# 1 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

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### *Editor's Preface*

*Understanding Your Middos*, is basically about how we can improve our *middos*. However, this is not your typical *sefer*. They form the background to all of the Rav's practical teachings on the *middos*. The Rav surveys the entire realm of the Oral Torah to lay the foundation for the practical application of these patterns embedded in *Chazal*.

It is a deep journey into our soul, and it is recommended to read this only after becoming familiar with the author's previous sefarim, most notably *Da Es Nafsecha* (available in English as *Getting To Know Your Soul*). The series is very "cosmic" - its a trip thru the universe and then back into your soul.

It is based on the beginning words of Rav Chaim Vital's *sefer*, *Shaarei Kedushah*, which state that there are four elements in the human soul, and that these elements are the roots of our "*middos*" (behavioral or character traits). They are: earth/laziness and sadness, water/desires, wind/evil speech, and fire/conceit.

Each of the four elements manifest themselves in our *middos*, so if we want to improve on our *middos*, we need to work with its root element and understand it. Chapters (audio files on the [www.bilvavi.net](http://www.bilvavi.net) site) 1-30 are about **earth**, Chapters 31-65 are about **water**, Chapters 66-88 are about **wind**, and Chapters 89-103 are about **fire**.

The author begins with our element of earth – the *middos* it produces (laziness and sadness), as well as the various other traits that earth is responsible for, such as constriction, hardening, dryness, containing, nullification, lowliness, heaviness, descent, and other natures. The traits of despair, brazenness, cruelty, hatred, forgetfulness and silence are also discussed within these chapters. The element of earth – its *middos* it produces, as well as its various natures – are the subject of Chapters 1-30. Classes 31-65 explains the element of water and its resulting *middos* (desire, pleasure, envy and jealousy), as well as the other traits of water, such as inner "coldness". Classes 66-88 explain the *middos* of the element of wind (evil speech, scoffing, mockery, falsity, and bragging), as well as its others nuances, such as the four directions of wind. Classes 89-103 explain our element of fire, its *middos* (conceit, anger, grudges, honor, control, and fiery hatred), and its other various traits (such as ascension), which help us understand our soul and work with it.

This is a deep and challenging series. As mentioned before, it is best to learn *sefer Da Es Nafsecha* of the author before embarking on *Da Es Middosecha*. It is also helpful before this to learn *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. V, Chapter Nine: *Working On Your Middos* (available in English at [www.bilvavi.net](http://www.bilvavi.net).)

How should one learn this *sefer*? *Da Es Middosecha* serves as a database for the knowledge about our *middos*, and we can use this information to help learn about ourselves. It is recommended to first peruse each chapter on a superficial level, even if you can't understand it fully right away. Then you can go back to review each chapter and attempt to understand the concepts by deeply reflecting into the words, slowly and carefully.

Don't forget to *daven* to Hashem for help in this – learning about your *middos* is only the *hishtadlus* (effort) part, but it's not everything! The author has reminded us that we need to involve Hashem throughout this entire journey toward self-improvement (See Bilvavi Part 5-"Working On Your Middos").

### 3 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

Hopefully, the study of this *sefer* will help each person improve his *middos* and come to perfect his character on this world, so we can all reach our *shleimus* – and to ultimately reach closeness to Hashem.

## *Author's Intro*

It is written, “Know today and return it to your heart . . .” This principle applies to every aspect of a person’s service of H’ and specifically to those areas of service that pertain to the refinement of midos -behavior or character traits.

The general view is that the work on midos essentially involves the heart —“return it to your heart” — rather than the mind —“know today.”

However, our teacher, the MaHaral, in his book, *NetivosOlam*, provides us with an intellectual approach to studying *middos* through the analysis of various sections of the Talmud. With this knowledge, we can acquire the ‘know today’ aspect of this service from which we can then fulfill the commandment to “return it to your heart.”

Similarly, this *sefer* does not offer practical suggestions for *middos* development, but rather follows the path laid out by the MaHaRal, who provides a deep analysis of the nature of *middos*.

However, in contrast to the MaHaRal’s *sefer*, which provides deep and extensive coverage of the views of our Sages with regard to each and every mida, this *sefer* provides a summary of the consensus that was reached by our Sages together with examples that illustrate each mida without extended discussion.. A broad and deep explanation of the teachings of chazal with regard to midos, together with a practical instruction in how to apply these teachings to the development of good midos, would require an entire *sefer* dedicated to each mida, which, if Hashem wills, is my dream for the future.

From the teachings of Rav Chaim Vital in his book , *Gates of Holiness*, we learned that although a person may have many *middos*, they are rooted in four fundamental elements : Fire, wind, water and earth. We have therefore organized our book in accordance with this basic four part structure. This volume explores the element of "earth," and represents only a fraction of the classes taught in this subject.

With acknowledgment to Hashem Yisbarach for the past I daven for the present and the future that I may merit to complete this work for all four of the fundamental elements. I further ask that this teaching be received in the minds and hearts of the readers and that it reveal within them the kind of mida development that is expressed in the admonition that we are to resemble Hashem such that it can be said of us in the fullest of ways that as He is, so are we.

# 001 | *Yesodos (Elements) and Middos (Behavioral Traits)*

### *What we first need to know*

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This *sefer* discusses how we can work on our *middos*.

The Torah is entirely Hashem's wisdom. Just like the rest of the Torah, the subject of our *middos* – its beginning and its end – needs to be understood, even before we work on them. We can't work on our *Middos* unless we understand them. Just like "a wise person's question is half the answer", so is the understanding of our *middos* already half way toward working on them.

After understanding what our *middos* are, we can work on them. "Learning Torah is great, for it brings one to do actions"<sup>1</sup>. If our wisdom doesn't affect us practically, it is a lack in our actual wisdom; like the Sages say: "Anyone who says, 'All I do is learn Torah' doesn't even have the Torah."<sup>2</sup>

The first part of working on our *middos* is understanding their roots, and then we can reach their practical applications. Understanding the roots of the *middos* isn't quick. It is a great, deep wisdom and it needs a lot of introductions to explain it. First we need to know about the roots, and then we can learn about its branches.

We will attempt, with the help of Hashem, to start from the roots and slowly continue onward with this, as much as Hashem gives us the strength to.

### *Three groups of Middos*

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We are commanded in the Torah "to go in Hashem's ways." From here our Sages learn that must cling to His *middos*. We are supposed to resemble Hashem, who is merciful and compassionate.<sup>3</sup> The Sages have thus essentially revealed to us in this that just like all of Creation is rooted in Hashem, so are our *middos* rooted in the *middos* of Hashem.

There are three groups of *Middos*: the root *Middos*, the soul's *middos* and the body's *middos*.

The root *Middos* are Hashem's *middos* -- the 13 Attributes of Mercy. We are commanded to resemble these *middos* of Hashem. These are the root *middos*.

The second group of *Middos* are the soul's own *Middos* – Kindness, Justice and Compassion. Just like Hashem has *middos*, He created the soul with its own *middos*. Each of our Avos personified each of these *middos*: Avraham personified kindness, Yitzchok personified justice, and Yaakov personified compassion. These *middos* are not *middos* of the body – they are *middos* of our very soul.

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<sup>1</sup> *Kiddushin 40b*

<sup>2</sup> *Yevamos 109b*

<sup>3</sup> *Shabbos 133b*

## 5 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

The third group of *Middos* are what we are generally referring to in this *sefer*. They are the *middos* which come from our *nefesh habehamis* – our animalistic part of our soul, which is the lowest part of our soul. They are also called our body's *middos*. They are our negative emotions we know of: anger, jealousy, desire, honor, and so forth.

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### ***It is only these middos which we need to fix***

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So there are three groups of *middos*: *Middos* of Hashem, *middos* of our soul, and *middos* of our body (or lower part of our soul). The first two groups of *middos* do not need to be fixed. Hashem is perfect; all his *middos* are good, and so is our soul only good *middos*; our soul is pure, and its *middos* are pure.

It is only our body's *middos* which need to be fixed. Since Adam ate from the tree – which was mixed with good and evil – our *middos* have become a mixture of good and evil.

From a superficial understanding, there are seven primary emotions: *ahavah*/love, *yirah*/fear, *hispaarus*/pride, *nitzachon*/victory, *hodayah*/gratitude, *hiskashrus*/connection and *shiflus*/lowliness.<sup>4</sup> This is the general picture of the *middos*. Just like Creation was created in seven days, so do we have seven *middos*. But these are just the external layers of our *middos* - the inner layers of our *middos* are called “*Da'as*” (lit. “knowledge”).

The Rambam, who codifies the proper conduct of a Jew, describes our *middos*/character traits as “*hilchos de'os*” – laws of “*Da'as*.” This is because the outer layer of our *middos* have endless scenarios, but the inner layer of our *middos* is always one and the same – it is always *Da'as*.

This means for us as follows. *Da'as* is mixed with good and evil in it. As soon as Adam sinned and ate from the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil”, all *middos* have become mixed with good and evil; *Da'as* still remains at the core of the *middos*, but the outer layers of our *Middos* are a mixture of good and evil.

For example, the *middah* of *gaavah*/arrogance can be holy, such as when a person uses *gaavah* for holy reasons; it is written, “*And his heart was high in the ways of Hashem.*” This is called *gaavah d'kedushah*. A person can use *gaavah* for evil, and this is the kind of *gaavah* of which Hashem says, “I and him cannot dwell under one roof.”

The *middah* of *kaas*/anger as well might either be for good or for bad. If a person is only showing anger outwardly to reprove someone, but he doesn't feel an anger in his heart, then such anger is commendable; we also find that Hashem has a moment of anger every day, and this is obviously holy. Anger is evil, though, when a person gets angry and loses belief in Hashem – the Sages say that such an angry person is like an idol worshipper.

The same goes for the rest of all the *Middos*. We can always find instances in which they are either used for good or bad.

Had Adam not eaten from the *Eitz HaDa'as* and instead have eaten from the *Eitz Hachaim*, then all our *middos* would always be good. Once Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDa'as*, all our *middos* became mixed with evil.

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### ***To summarize so far, there are three kinds of middos.***

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<sup>4</sup> These seven emotions can be used either positively or negatively, and they are the subject of another *sefer* of the author, *Da Es Hargoshecha* (*Getting To Know Your Feelings*).

## 6 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

There are *middos* of Hashem, which are always completely good.

These are the *middos* that also exist in the depths of our soul, and they are totally pure.

There are also *middos* which stem from our body – in other words, our *nefesh habehamis* (the animal layer of our soul) – and these *middos* are a mixture of good and bad. It is this third category of *middos* which we seek to improve – this is where the area of *tikkun hamiddos* lies.

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### ***There Is No Such Thing As ‘Bad’ Middos***

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Having clarified that all our *middos* are a mixture of good and evil – for they are all rooted in the *Eitz HaDa'as* – we can understand another fundamental which our Rabbis taught: there is no such thing as a “bad” *middah* or a “good” *middah*. The whole issue with our *middos* is how we are using it.

*Da'as*, by essence, is always good and positive. When it is used wisely, it is called what we call “good” – but when misused, it is what we call “bad.”

Our Rabbis identified *Da'as* as the power to lead (*hanhagah*). Moshe Rabbbeinu personified *Da'as*, and he is the leader of the Jewish people – the “faithful shepherd” of Hashem.

That is true for the general, collective soul of the Jewish people. But when it comes to each person as an individual, *da'as* is our power to “go in His ways” (*V'holachta b'drachav*). It is an ability in a person to lead himself and guide himself. If a person goes in the right way, his *da'as* is called *da'as tov*, “good” *da'as*. If he is going in the incorrect path, his *da'as* is *da'as ra*, “evil” *da'as* – like the students of Bilaam, who misuse their *da'as*.

These are the words of our holy rabbis. They are clear matters. Now we will continue to the next step of this.

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### ***The Roots of the Middos: The Four Elements***

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The words of Rav Chaim Vital, in his *sefer Shaarei Kedushah*, are well-known: Man is made up of the four *yesodos*/elements – fire, wind, water and earth.<sup>5</sup>

He writes as well that these four elements are the roots of our *middos*. Arrogance and anger come from our fire. Forbidden speech comes from our wind. Desires come from our water. Sadness and laziness come from our earth.

In these words, Rav Chaim Vital has defined our *middos*: they are all essentially an outcome of its root element. For example, anger is not just a *middah* of anger – it is a result from an imbalance in the element of fire in the soul. Evil desires are a result from an imbalanced element of water, and sadness comes from an imbalanced element of earth, and so forth.

Our *middos* that we identify – arrogance, anger, forbidden speech, desires, sadness, laziness, etc. – are just the outer layer of the *middos*. The inner layer of our *middos* is the four elements – fire, wind, water, and earth. The four elements are the roots of our *middos* – which are the branches. Thus, fire is not a branch of arrogance; rather,

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<sup>5</sup> For more on this, see also *sefer Imrei Pinchas*, Vol. I, p.401.

## 7 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

arrogance is a branch of fire. Water is not the branch of desires – it is the other way around: desires are a branch of water.

From the words of Rav Chaim Vital, we see the deep approach to improve our *middos*: instead of working on our *middos*, we must work with their roots – which are the four elements. *Tikkun Hamiddos* is thus essentially all about fixing our fire, our wind, our water, and our earth.

For example, a person wants to get rid of his *gaavah*. From the superficial perspective, he needs to do just that – get rid of his *gaavah*. But the inner perspective is that he needs to fix up his element of fire. If a person wants to stop having lustful desires, the inner approach is to fix his element of water, as opposed to attempting to get rid of his desires.

When a person works to improve his *middos*, the question is: Is he working with the branches of the problem, or with the roots of the problem?

A person has to get to the root of the problem.

A person can do this either by directly tackling the root of the problem and then working with the branches, or he can at least start by working with the branches of the problem until he gets to the root of the problem. Either way, he must deal with the root of the problem at some point. Just working on the branches of the problem will prove unsuccessful.

We can see many people try to work on their *middos* and don't succeed. The Kotzker Rebbe zt"l said that this is because such people are trying to "break" their bad *middos*, and then they end up with "two" bad *middos*...

Why aren't people successful in improving their *middos*? It is because the person is only trying to fix the branches of the problem, not the root of the problem. A person has a lustful desire, and he wants to get rid of these desires by trying to break his desires – but this is only working on the branches of the problem. The root of the problem here lies in the element of water, which is the root of desire.

Therefore, if we want to define what it means to work on our *middos*, working on our "*middos*" is an incorrect definition! Working on our *middos* really means to work on our four elements of the soul: fire, wind, water, and earth. To be more precise, it is fire, wind, and water which are the active elements, while earth acts as a container for them.

The *middos* are really hidden – they aren't revealed to us. We see our *middos*, but we don't see their essence, which are our four elements. We can all see and identify anger or arrogance or forbidden speech or sadness. But we do not see their roots – the elements behind them.

Our Rabbis found a hint to this. Fire in Hebrew is *aish*. Water is *mayim*, and wind is *avir* (air). If we take the first letter of each of these three words, we get "*emesh*", which means "yesterday" in Hebrew. In other words, the three active elements of fire, wind and earth are always like yesterday – gone before we can even identify it. The four elements are hidden from us. People may have heard about the four elements, but do not actually identify with them.

As a result, people have misconceptions when they try to work on their *middos*. They attempt to break their *middos* – the *middah* itself, without uncovering its root element. A person might look through many sefarim for advice on how to work on any of his *middos*: how to work on anger, how to work on arrogance, etc. But to try to work on oneself in this way lacks a basic understanding of our *middos* and how we work on them.



## 8 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

We need to start by learning about our *yesodos*/elements, not about our *middos*. From learning about our elements, we can come to learn about our *middos* – with the help of Hashem. We need to first learn what fire, wind, water, and earth are about. Then we need to see how each of the elements are actually comprised of the other three, and how each of the elements can be used in a healthy and unhealthy way. We need to learn how to steer our unhealthy usages of the elements in a positive and healthy direction.

That is *tikkun hamiddos*.

### ***This Does Not Apply To The Middos of Hashem***

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We will emphasize here that when we discuss the four elements, as we mentioned before, we are not speaking about how Hashem uses these elements. Although we find sometimes that Hashem is called “a consuming fire” or a “wind of Hashem”, and other such places, we are not speaking about the Creator here or even about His *middos*.

We are also not speaking here about the four elements of our *neshamah* – the higher part of our soul, which is completely spiritual.

We are discussing here only the *middos* which stem from our body, which our physical emotions. It is our physical emotions which are made up of the elements of fire, wind, water and earth.

There are elements which are lower than the kind we are discussing, and these are the purely physical elements we see. This is the dirt we walk on, the water we drink, the air we feel and the fire we cook with. We are definitely not discussing these four elements, which are entirely physical.

Anything in the material world is made up of the four elements. Everything contains in it some warmth (fire), some movement (wind), some moisture or coldness (water), and some structure (earth). The table and chair in front of us contains each of the four elements – but we are not coming to explain what this is. We are discussing the four elements of our soul – the fire in our soul, the wind in our soul, the water in our soul, and the earth in our soul. It is an entirely different class of its own.

### ***How The Elements Complement Each Other***

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As we have brought from our teachers, each of the four elements has its own nature. The nature of fire is warmth and dryness. The nature of wind is warmth and moisture. Water is cold and moist, while earth is cold and dry.<sup>6</sup>

Each of the four elements this divides into two classes: it is either hot or cold, and it is either moist or dry. These natures define the four elements.

Everything is made up of opposites – there is a good and evil side to everything. Hashem created an opposite for everything. If there is warmth, there is coldness. If there is dryness, there is moisture.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Remak, *siman 82*, page 308; also see *Pardes Rimonim*, *shaar 9*, and *Shaar HaMachriim perek 3*; also see *Midrash HaNeelam: Zohar Chadash: 17b*, and *Gra to Yeshayahu 11:1*.

<sup>7</sup> See *Gra*, *Tikkunim*, *Tikkun 69*.

## 9 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

The two root elements are fire and water. Fire is hot and dry, while water is moist and cold. By contrast, wind and earth each take one of the natures of each fire and water. Earth resembles water in that it is naturally cold, and it also resembles fire in that it is dry. The earth gets its coldness from water, and it gets its dryness from fire. Wind gets its natural heat from fire, and it gets its moisture from water. To be more specific: heat is rooted in fire, coldness is rooted in water, moisture is rooted in wind, and dryness is rooted in earth.

Fire and water are natural opposites – we do not ever find a combination of them. Water puts out fire, and fire heats up water and evaporates it. Fire and water are always the classic example of opposites, according to the Sages; that is the phenomenon of the heavens, which are called *shomayim* – a combination of the words *aisb* (fire) and *mayim* (water).

However, the other elements of wind and earth can serve as a bridge between them and maintain equilibrium in between the fire and water. How can we see this? The element of earth in the soul gets warmth from fire and moisture from water, or it gets dryness from fire and coldness from water. In this way, the qualities of fire and water can be put together without putting each other out.

If the world (and our soul) would only have fire and water in it, we couldn't exist. For this, we have wind and earth. Wind can sustain fire, as we find that the wind can blow fire in a certain direction. Wind can also direct water by making clouds from the moisture of water. "Difficult waters can be taken care of, by the clouds."<sup>8</sup> From this we see that wind can combine with both fire and water. Earth can also combine with fire and water and take qualities from each.

Thus, the elements of wind and earth serve to combine the various *middos*.<sup>9</sup>

### ***The Real Meaning of "Good" Middos***

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Let us make this matter clearer.

What exactly is a good *middah*, and what is a bad *middah*?

In the beginning of this chapter, we have said that a good *middah* is when we use the *middah* positively, and a bad *middah* is when we use the *middah* negatively. That is a proper, general definition. But to give a more detailed definition, a good *middah* is when we combine a *middah* with its opposite. A bad *middah*, by contrast, is when we fail to combine a *middah* with its opposite.

We can give an example for this from *Chazal*, concerning the *middos* of Hashem. It is written, "*Serve Hashem with awe, and rejoice with trembling.*" *Chazal*<sup>10</sup> explain this to mean, "Where there is rejoicing, let there be trembling there." What is the meaning of this statement? Many explanations are given, but there is one that applies to our current discussion: good *middos* are *middos* that can work together with an opposing *middah*.

For example, fire and water, the classic opposites, are combined to form heaven. For this reason, Hashem is called "He who makes peace on high." In Heaven, the angels only have good *middos*, because in Heaven, opposites

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<sup>8</sup> *Bava Basra* 10a

<sup>9</sup> See *Meor Einayim*, *parshas Mattos*

<sup>10</sup> *Yalkut Shimeoni*, *Tehillim*, 623.

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can come together in harmony. But on this world, fire and water do not combine, and thus we find bad *middos* on this world amongst people. Bad *middos* are essentially a product of failing to synthesize opposing *middos*.

In this lays a deep and basic understanding about “good *middos*” and “bad *middos*.” Simply speaking, we think that anger or jealousy are bad *middos*, and that nothing good can be said of them; and that good *middos* means to benefit other people by acting refined. This is true, but there is a deeper definition to our *middos*.

If we have a superficial perspective and merely look at our *middos* as “*middos*”, then we a good *middah* means to use a *middah* for a good cause – such as to use *gaavah* for a holy purpose – and a bad *middah* is to use a *middah* for evil purposes. But if we have the inner perspective on our *middos* – which is to see the elements behind them – then we can see either a *middah* that results from a combination of two opposing elements (which will result in a good *middah*), or we see a *middah* that results from a separation of these elements (which will result in a bad *middah*).

For this reason, someone who achieves perfection of character is called “*adam shalem*” – “perfect man”. Someone who has attained that balance between all his various *middos* has succeed in combining opposite *middos*, and thus he gains the tile of *adam shalem*.

In order to achieve this equilibrium, we need to understand the natures of each of the elements. We also need to know be aware of all the opposite natures in different elements we encounter, and then we can see how to combine them.

If we are to succeed in combining all the various *middos* together and to attain this equilibrium, we first need to see how the various natures of the elements contradict and oppose each other.

### *Unifying the Middos*

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We will broaden this discussion more.

A person has either a superficial perspective on life, or has the inner perspective.

From the superficial perspective, life appears to us as a bunch of details. Our spiritual mission seems daunting from all the details it entails, and our physical life is also full of countless details. Our spiritual job on this earth involves Torah study, the *mitzvos*, doing kindness, having good *middos*, *davening*, etc. Every person can add his own list of what he is supposed to attain spiritually.

Is there anything that connects all these details together? A superficial response would be, “Yes, because they are all about *ruchniyus*”, or “They are all about serving the Creator.” That is true, but this is a shallow mentality.

The inner answer to this involves using our power of wisdom. The Menorah was made up of many details, but it is called “*miksheh achas*” – “one piece.” In other words, there is a way for a person to see how many details connect into one piece. The Sages say that if one wants to become wise, he should go southward, because the Menorah was in the south of the Temple<sup>11</sup>; in other words, if one wants to be wise, he should see the lesson from the Menorah, which was all “one piece.”

What we need is to acquire a “unified outlook”, in which we can see a bunch of details as all one being one piece.

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<sup>11</sup> *Bava Basra 25b*

## 11 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

When it comes to our *middos*, the same is true. How many good *middos* are there, and how many bad *middos* are there? Open up a *sefer Orchos Tzaddikim*, and you will find a list of thirty various *middos*. If you look through more *sefarim*, you will find even more *middos*...

If a person is trying to improve his “*middos*” – he wants to work on his anger, on his jealousy, on his desire, on abstaining from honor, on becoming happier, on becoming more energetic with doing *mitzvos*, etc. – this is a proper thing to do, but it will take too much work. We know that “The task is not upon you to complete”, but we also know that “You are not either exempt from it.” Working on each *middah* separately takes too much work. It is a superficial approach.

The inner approach is to have a unified perspective. Instead of seeing how there are so many *middos* to work on, see how you can unify them all together.

With this approach, it's not that you have to “work on your *gaavah*” or “work on your anger.” That is not the Ein Sof! The Ein Sof is to learn how to combine our *gaavah* or our anger with the other *middos*. Combining our anger with another *middah* will refine our anger, and combining our *gaavah* with another *middah* will refine our *gaavah*.

This is not just another way of defining *tikkun hamiddos*. It is a perspective which can totally transform a person's life.

### *The Order of the Elements - and The Lesson We Learn From It*

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Now we can understand another thing.

We have said that there are four elements in Creation – fire, wind, water and earth. *Chazal* reveal to us that first Hashem created wind, and from wind He made water; from water He made fire, from water He made snow, and from snow He made earth.

Why did Hashem make it this way? Why didn't He just create each of them all at once separately – why did He have to make it that one element created another? It is to show that the four elements are not meant to be worked on separately; they are meant to be combined, and that is how we fix them. Had they been created each separately, it wouldn't be possible to unify them all together. Instead, one element lead to the next element, and this shows us that they can be combined and unified.

We see this correlation as well from the creation of man and woman. Hashem first created them as one body, and then He took Adam's rib and created Chavah from it. Why didn't He instead create them as two bodies to start out with and then unify them? It is because only something that was one unit to start out with can return to its unified state. But if it is separated to begin with, then it never becomes unified again.

We also find this concept by an infant, who is taught the entire Torah in his mother's womb, only to get tapped by an angel on his mouth and forget it all. We can ask: If he's going to forget the Torah anyway, what is the point of being taught by the angel? There is a well-known answer to this question, that in order for a person to return to once again knowing the Torah, he first has to have known it at some point beforehand. If a person would never have been taught the Torah beforehand, he wouldn't be able to return to it.

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The same is true for our *middos*. If our *middos* were just meant to be separate creations – we would never be able to connect them together. After all, if they each stand on their own, why should I connect them? The job would be just to fix each *middah* separately.

But when we understand the inner depth to *tikkun hamiddos*, we see that the *middos* all come from each other because they are meant to become connected. It is our mission to unify them all together, as they were at their initial created state.

### ***Middah – “Measured”***

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The word “*middos*” has two meanings. It can either mean character traits, such as love, fear, anger, happiness, etc. Or, it can mean “measure” – in other words, *middos* have limits. It seems that these two definitions of the concept of “*middos*” are totally different and not related – one kind of *middos* is our emotions, while the other kind of *middos* are measurements of the Torah, such as three cubits (*amos*), three handbreadths (*tefachim*), the size of an olive (*k’zayis*), the size of an egg (*k’beitzah*), etc.

But the root of both meanings is one and the same, and thus they are indeed related. If we know what the root of both meanings is, it sharpens our understanding of the *middos*.

Every *middah* is essentially limited – when it reaches up until its proper limit, it is defined “*middah*.” *Middos* which break the limit of that *middah* lose their title of *middah*. When the rules of a *middah* have been broken, it is no longer a *middah*, because by very essence, a *middah* is limited; if its limits have been crossed, it is by definition not a *middah*.

It appears simply to us that there are “good” *middos* and “bad” *middos*. But this is actually incorrect. A bad *middah* is not a *middah*, because since the limits of the *middah* have been broken, it is no longer a *middah* – thus there is no such thing as a “bad” *middah*. If we want to give a title to “bad *middos*”, we can call them just “bad” – something which either went over the limits, or didn’t reach its limits.

When a *middah* is in its proper place, it can be said that “A man who stands in his place comes in peace.” When a person crosses the line of where he’s supposed to be, peace is ruined, and strife starts.

If so, now we know what “good *middos*” are what “bad *middos*” are. Good *middos* are when our elements are in proper measurement, not crossing their limits. In this situation, opposites can combine and work together, because they won’t spread out into places they aren’t supposed to be. But if a person’s *middos* aren’t in measure - if their limits are being broken – then we call this “bad *middos*” (because we have no other way of describing this).

### ***Each Element Divides Into Four Parts***

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Our Rabbis also taught that each of the elements have in them all four elements. In fire, there is fire, as well as wind, water and earth. The same goes for the rest of the elements as well. Altogether, there are sixteen possibilities, because each of the four elements divides into four.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See *Shaar HaGilgulim, Hakdamah, 18. See also Eitz Chaim, Shaar 50.*



## 13 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

Therefore, when we speak of how to balance the elements, there are two different ways to balance. One way is to balance each of the elements with the other elements, and another way is to balance the elements within each of the elements. (Later, with the help of Hashem, we will explain that just as there is an Ein Sof to balance the elements, so is there an Ein Sof to differentiate between each of the elements and work with each one separately).

In addition to this, we must also know that if a certain nature is manifest in one of the elements, it also exists in the other elements. For example, when we learn about the various natures of earth, those same traits also exist in water; it is not manifest in the element of water itself, but in the *earth* contained in the water. You will also find it in the earth of wind, as well as in the earth of fire.

For example, if earth has a certain nature, then we can find that very same nature also in wind, water and fire. The only question is if that nature is coming from a certain element as a whole (either earth, wind, water or fire), or if it is coming from a more specific nature (either from the earth contained in fire, earth contained in wind, or earth contained in water).



In the coming chapters, with the help of Hashem, we will learn about each of the elements. First we will study the general concept of each element, and its natures. Then we will learn how to balance each element with the other elements, until we get to the practical outcomes from this.

The words here are based on the words of our Rabbis. We will try to explain these matters at their root, at their source, as much as possible. This is not my own logic that I have devised; it is rather an arrangement and clarification of their words.

## 002 | *Understanding Laziness (Part One)*

### *The Middos That Result From Earth: Laziness and Sadness*

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We will begin, with the help of Hashem, by learning about the lowest element in the soul – earth.

Before, we mentioned the words of Rav Chaim Vital, that the *middos* which result from earth are: 1) Laziness and 2) Sadness.

We need to understand here how exactly earth causes these two *middos*.

In earth, there are many various natures. First we will try to understand the two general *middos* which come from earth – laziness and sadness – and with the help of Hashem, we will continue to explain more of the natures of earth.

### *Movement – the Essence of Creation*

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In order to understand what the element of earth is, we need a general introduction before this.

We brought before the words of our rabbis that Hashem created the elements in the following order: wind, water, fire, and earth. Why did wind come first? The nature of wind is movement, and movement essentially defines all of Creation. Creation began from one point and will eventually return to that source it was created from; there is a beginning, and an end, to the Creation.

To illustrate, “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world.” The Torah begins with the word “Beraishis”, (“In the beginning”) and ends with the word “Yisrael” – the first letter of the Torah is beis, and the last letter of the Torah is lamed, forming the word lev (heart).

The concept is that there is a beginning and end to everything, and the end point always returns to the beginning point.

Hashem is endless (His endlessness is called the *Ein Sof*), and thus we have no comprehension of Him. His Creation, however, is something we can conceptualize, since it has a certain structure: it has a beginning and end. The beginning of Creation was the beginning of all movement, and the end of Creation will be an end to all movement.

Our Ein Sof (mission) is to come to the end point – the true End of Days. In order to get to this end point, we need to move towards it in the right way, and we must avoid movements that further us away from the goal. (This is a reference to sin, which is evil movement.)

Creation is moving. It is all about a path toward a certain goal (tahalich). Hashem didn't create it all at once, but as a process spread out over six days, until the process of Creation was brought to rest on the seventh day; this reflects how all of Creation is all a tahalich of movement.

## 15 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

That is the Creation which Hashem has created, and from that point on, He has given us the mission to complete the journey. Had Adam not sinned, he would have completed the tahalich of Creation and he would have gone straight into an eternal Shabbos – the World to Come. But he succumbed to the sin, and from then on, the tahalich of Creation lengthened into a 6,000 year journey.

It's not happenstance that Creation moves. Movement is the essence of Creation – it defines how we start from the beginning point at Creation and get to the end point, our goal. In order to get to the end goal of Creation (human perfection and thus, the complete connection with Hashem), we need to move toward it in the right way; and we must choose not to have incorrect movements (sin).

This is the concept – that movement is the essence of Creation, and without it, we cannot get to our goal.

### *Earth - The Unmoving Element*

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Let's think about the four elements – fire, wind, water and earth. Which of them move, and which of them don't move?

Fire naturally moves. Wind moves, and in essence, wind is essentially a moving force by definition. Water also can move – although it is naturally still, *Chazal* remark about water that “it leaves its high place (the sky) and comes to a lower place (the waters of the world)”,<sup>13</sup> so we see some concept of movement also by water.

Earth is the only element which does not move. “The earth stands forever.”<sup>14</sup> The truth is that earth is the most novel thing in Creation!

There are four kinds of organisms in Creation: doimem (non-living), tzomeach (growing), chai (life-forms), and medaber (social creatures/humans). All of these organisms correspond to one of the four elements. Non-living things correspond to the element of earth. Things that grow correspond to water, which nourishes and allows for growth. Living things correspond to wind, because even animals are called “ruach chaim” – “a spirit of life”.

(Humans correspond to fire, because fire is the highest from all the elements, and so are humans in the highest status from any creature. We will not get into this point now, though, and perhaps later we will discuss it.)

Plants, animals and people all move. Plants move the least from all of these things, but they still move a little as they grow; a root underground which sprouted into a tree is a movement. By contrast, non-living objects are still, and they never move.

Earth is thus different in this aspect from the other three elements, and that it does not move. That is its novelty concept.

The fact that the non-living/earth doesn't move is a very big novelty in Creation. Everything else in Creation starts from a certain point and then moves toward an end point, but non-living things/earth are still and unmoving, totally defying everything that Creation is. (On a subtle note, even earth moves, because the planets revolve around the sun, so they are all always moving. However, we cannot consider this to be movement, because the earth is being sustained by air, water and fire, thus all its movements depend on the other elements; earth by itself cannot move at all).

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<sup>13</sup> *Taanis 7a*

<sup>14</sup> *Koheles 1: 4*

## 16 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

The power to be non-moving can be used either for good or evil. As we said in the beginning chapter, a good middah means that the middah is staying within its proper limits, while a bad middah is any middah which has gone over the limits.

So far, we have seen the concept that earth is in essence a force of non-movement, something that stays in its place. Now we will list some examples of how we see non-movement throughout different areas of Creation.

### *The Ability to Remain Unchanged*

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Our rabbis teach that earth/dirt, “afar” in Hebrew, can be rearranged in its letters to form the word “oref”, “neck.”

We find oref in the word “keshei oref” – “stiff-necked.” When we want to get someone to change his ways and he doesn’t want to change, this is called keshei oref – he’s stubbornly staying where he is, with no interest to change. Being stiff-necked is thus all about being unchanging.

Where can we find such a concept in Creation?

If something moves, then its movement is really changing it by getting it to move. When something moves, it is either moving up or down; in spiritual terms, the Vilna Gaon states that a person is never still, because he is either rising or falling in his spirituality. If he rises, he has changed for the better, and if he is falling in his spirituality, he has changed for the worse. All movements cause a change.

The power of free will (bechirah) in a person is also about movement. A person has a choice to either choose good, which is to move in the right direction, or to choose sin, which is to move in the wrong direction. Whichever way he moves, there will in either case be a change.

Non-living things in Creation – the element of earth – do not move; when non-movement is used to be unchanging, this is evil, like we see from the person who is a keshei oref, stiff-necked and stubborn in his evil ways. It is a power rooted in the element of earth.

This is one example of how we see earth is non-moving: when non-movement is used a way to be unchanging.

### *Laziness – No Movement*

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Now, let us return to the words of Rav Chaim Vital we brought in the beginning of this chapter, that the middah of laziness is rooted in the element of earth.

Why is laziness rooted in earth? The simple answer would be obvious: because earth has a nature to be heavy and weigh things down (earth is the heaviest from all of the four elements), so laziness is related to earth, because a lazy person feels too heavy to want to perform. This is true, simple, and clear.

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But there is a deeper reason. As we explained, earth is non-moving. This is really the depth behind laziness. Laziness is rooted in earth because earth is non-moving. When a person's element of earth becomes too dominant, resulting in an imbalance of his four elements<sup>15</sup>, he becomes used to being non-moving, and this breeds on laziness.

Earth itself doesn't move, but if it is combined with the other elements – in an unbalanced way – it causes in a person to be slow-moving, which is laziness.

Thus, laziness is really a garment of the element of earth. When the earth in the soul is unbalanced by the other elements, it is not only pulled down by the heavy nature of earth – it is pulled toward the non-moving nature of earth. The non-movement of earth (when the earth is imbalanced by the other elements) affects one's other elements (fire, water and wind) as well to function improperly, which results in laziness.

A lazy person therefore has two problems. He does things slowly – that is one problem. There is another part to his problem, and it is deeper: he doesn't move at all.

When a person only moves slowly, this is called *atzaltayim*. This is a kind of laziness in which the person performs, but with heaviness - very slowly.

When Yaakov Avinu heard good news (that he was to be protected from harm by a miracle), he ran. Rashi explains that this is because “when a person feels light, he runs.” *Chazal* say to “run like a deer” – a deer is light, and that is why it runs. Feeling heavy, by contrast, makes a person move slowly.

Moving slowly is a kind of laziness, but it's not yet the epitome of laziness, because the person is still performing.

The non-movement in earth is what is responsible for total laziness, in which a person's element of earth becomes so dominant that he doesn't move at all.

Laziness has an external layer and an inner layer to it. The external layer of it is slow movement. The inner layer of laziness, its essence, is to be non-moving.

Let us reflect into the words of our Rabbis regarding this topic, in order for us to sharpen our understanding of this matter. We will try, with the help of Hashem, to explain words of our Sages regarding this matter, so that we can have the source of the information here; and so that we will be able to see how everything is actually rooted in the wisdom of the holy Torah. After this, we will be able to see how to make this practical in our life, with the help of Hashem.

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### ***Man Was Fashioned Out Of All Four Directions***

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When Hashem created Adam, He created his body from the earth; man's soul was blown into him from the mouth of Hashem, as it were. Why was man created from dirt? What is the depth behind this?

The *Gemara* says that the dirt used by Hashem to fashion Adam's body was taken from all over the earth.<sup>16</sup> Why did Hashem have to take the dirt from all over the world? Did He not have enough dirt to make Adam with that He had to go all over the world to get it?!

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<sup>15</sup> See *Getting To Know Your Soul of the author*.

<sup>16</sup> *Sanhedrin 38a*



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The depth to this is that people are all about movement. Hashem thus created man out of earth, which doesn't move – and our purpose is to reveal how even earth can be non-moving!

Earthy by itself cannot move at all. But if it is combined with the other elements in a balanced way, it can move. As an example, wind is the moving force in Creation, when we combine wind with earth, the dust can be lifted by the wind and move from place to place.

Wind moves fast, while earth doesn't move at all. Both are extremes. But when we combine them, the wind's movements become more balanced due to the lack of movement coming from the earth, while at the same time the earth gains from the wind in that it can now move. From this we can see that earth can balance out wind.

A person is created from two elements – wind and earth. The element of wind which we are created from is our soul, which is called “*nishmas chaim*” – a “breath of life” that Hashem blew into Adam. Man also has a body, which was created from the earth. When there is proper balance between the body and the soul, the body is able to “move” properly.

For this reason, Adam's body was taken from all ends of the earth, to show us that earth can be given movement, and in this way, we come to fix up our element of earth. The fact that man's body was taken from all four directions shows that “wind” can come and fix “earth”.

When Adam sinned, he was cursed, “For you are earth, and to earth you shall return.” When a person dies as well, he is buried in the ground and returns to the earth. Why? The depth behind this is because a sin causes a person to lose the proper movements of his soul. On a more subtle note, sin causes a person to lose his very movements; the *sefer* *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that as soon as a person entertains a thought to sin, his soul leaves him! The movements of his body are then ruined, and he reflects the non-moving element of earth when it is imbalanced.

### ***Fixing Earth By Giving It Movement***

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Let us think into another example of this concept that we see in the words of *Chazal*.

The second sin in Creation (after the sin of Adam) was the sin of the Golden Calf. At Har Sinai, the souls of the Jewish people were cleansed from the impurity caused by the first sin, and they returned to their original purity that existed before the sin of Adam. Their element of earth became fixed. But by the sin of the Calf, death once again was pronounced upon the world.

At Har Sinai, the Jewish people reached a state of *G-dliness*. After they sinned with the Calf, they returned to the curse of death placed upon mankind. Just as Adam after the sin was cursed with “Dirt you are, and to dirt you shall return”, so did the sin with the Calf result in that curse of “To dirt you shall return.”

When Moshe Rabbeinu came down from Har Sinai with the *Luchos* (Tablets) and he saw what was going on, he broke them, and he shattered it so much until it became fine dust, which he then threw upon water.<sup>17</sup> Why did he do this?

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<sup>17</sup> *Shemos* 32: 20

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Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to show that even when we are in a situation of “Dirt you are, and to dirt you shall return” (because of the sin), that it is still possible to fix up our impaired element of earth. He showed this by grounding the Tablets up until it became dust, which then became spread out after he threw it – the spreading out of the dust symbolized how we need to fix the element of earth by “moving” it.

Our element of earth is impaired when it is non-moving. When it begins to become fixed up, it moves. When it is completely fixed, it moves in the right direction. This is the general concept of how fix our impaired element of earth – giving our earth some movement.

### ***Earth Gains Importance Only When Combined With the Other Elements***

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Now, we can understand the following.

When the Sages wanted to describe something that has no importance, they define it as “like the dust of the earth”. When we nullify the chametz on Erev Pesach, we say: “Let it be nullified and given up, like the dust of the earth.” When something isn’t important, we consider it to be like dirt/earth.

Why is dirt/earth the epitome of something unimportant? In today’s times, people will pay a lot of money to purchase mounds of dirt! Dirt might be worthless in small amounts, but piles of it have a lot of value and will cost you money to buy it. Drops of water are also not worth much. So why is earth seen by the Sages as unimportant, “like the dust of the earth”?

It is because earth, by itself, has no value. This is understood according to what we have explained until now: our purpose is to move in Creation from its beginning point until the end point, which will be the ultimate connection with Hashem. If something does not come to its goal, it is considered worthless, because it has not lived up to the goal. When we cannot produce anything from something, that is the definition of something that has no value.

(Later we will mention another reason why earth/dirt is unimportant: because earth is a non-active element, unlike the elements of fire, wind and water which cause activity. Earth, by itself, is worthless).

The truth is that you can do a lot with dirt. We plant things in it, we grow things in it, and most of our nourishment depends on the vegetables which grow from the earth. But that is only because the earth is working together with the other elements. When dirt is by itself (without rain/water, sunlight/fire, and air/wind), it cannot produce any plants, and it’s worthless.

Earth only gains importance when it moves – meaning, when it combines properly with the other elements. Otherwise, earth has no value – “like the dust of the earth.”

We can give even more examples to this from *Chazal*, but let it suffice with the three examples alone we have brought. From these examples, we see the general concept.

### ***Good Laziness***

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On the other hand, we find in the words of *Chazal* a total opposite of what we brought until now.

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*Chazal* state that the women did not sin with the Golden Calf, and they refused to give their jewelry towards it when their men asked them to. *Chazal* remarked on this that the laziness of the women prevented them from sinning. Tosafos<sup>18</sup> also states in the name of the Yerushalmi that “women are lazy, and they cannot be relied upon to nullify the chametz.” Women have a tendency toward laziness.

If not for this statement of our Sages, we would have said that the women didn't sin with the Calf either because they feared Hashem or loved Hashem so much. This is true, but the Sages say something else - that the reason they didn't sin was because they were lazy, and this helped them avoid the sin.

How can laziness be a reason to prevent one from sin? If laziness is bad trait, how does it help a person avoid sin?!

Let us compare this to a person who did something that was wrong, and this resulted in something that was good and beneficial. Something good came from the evil he did. It seems that now his laziness is good, because even though he acted evil by being lazy, in the end this caused something good to happen from it.

Let's say, for example, that a person was lazy and didn't run to catch the bus, and then he hears in the news that there was a terrible accident with that bus and everybody on the bus was tragically killed. What a relief he feels that he didn't run to catch the bus! It might seem that his laziness was a good thing, because his laziness actually saved his life.

Any person with an able-thinking mind understands that just because his life was saved, this does not justify his laziness. So we still need to understand how laziness can ever be a good thing.

When *Chazal* said that the women were lazy not to sin with the Golden Calf, this was a praise of the women. In this statement, *Chazal* have revealed to us how laziness can be positive. It is the concept of holy laziness (atzlus d'kedushah).

### ***More Examples of Positive Laziness***

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There are more instances in *Chazal* in which we find a concept of “holy laziness.”

The *Gemara*<sup>19</sup> brings a statement from one of the Sages: “I praise the lazy ones, who do not leave their houses in order to travel (to Jerusalem for Yom Tov)<sup>20</sup>, for it is written, “And you shall rejoice, you and your family.” Rashi explains this statement to mean, “I praise the lazy ones – even though it is not because of the festival that they are remaining where they are, because during the rest of the year they do ever not leave their homes, since they are lazy – even so, I praise them.”

In other words, these lazy people are happier on Yom Tov by staying home rather than having to travel, and even though they are just acting lazy as usual, their laziness becomes holy, since it allows them to enjoy Yom Tov better by remaining home.

If not for this statement of *Chazal*, we would never praise a lazy person. We would say that if a lazy person didn't travel to Jerusalem for Yom Tov, it's not because he wants to fulfill the mitzvah of Simchas Yom Tov, but because

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<sup>18</sup> *Pesachim 4b*

<sup>19</sup> *Sukkah 27b*

<sup>20</sup> *In the period of the Beis HaMikdash, there is a Torah obligation to travel to Jerusalem for each of the Three Festivals (Sukkos, Pesach and Shavuos). This is the mitzvah of “aliyah l'regel” – lit. “going up by foot.”*

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he's just being like his usual self. We would have said that it doesn't matter that he's happier on Yom Tov and fulfilling the mitzvah better – he's just being lazy! But *Chazal* look at this differently: that there are times in which a person's natural laziness is holy.

We also find similarly in the Midrash<sup>21</sup> that “A wise person is lazy in his eyes [he is lazy sometimes], such as Shlomo Hamelech, who held back his mouth from speaking in front of one who was greater than him.”

We can ask, what does holding back from talking have to do with laziness? Isn't it just acting respectful, that you shouldn't speak in front of someone who's greater? Yet, *Chazal* say that it has to do with utilizing laziness for a holy reason.

*Chazal* also state<sup>22</sup> that if someone is lazy not to sin, his laziness is a positive trait.

How exactly can holiness be lazy? If it is laziness in the simple sense, how can it ever be a positive thing? What exactly can turn it holy?

To answer this, we will intensify the point we have said until now, and then we will be able to understand how indeed laziness can be used either for evil or for good.

### ***Connecting the Elements By First Separating Them***

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We explained before that there are two kinds of laziness.

One kind of laziness is *atzaltayim*, when a person acts slowly. This is not a total imbalance in one's element of earth, but it is rather coming from a partial dominance in the element of earth over one's other elements. When the earth in the soul begins to dominate over the other elements, a person's movements are slowed, and he becomes unbalanced. He moves, but only slowly.

The second kind of laziness is when one's element of earth is totally dominant, and earth all by itself is non-moving, which causes a person to become totally non-moving. This is real laziness.

As we explained in the beginning of this chapter, non-movement goes against our purpose in Creation, for we are supposed to get moving towards our goal. If so, how can laziness ever be a good thing, if it is all about non-movement – the antithesis to what all of Creation stands for?

Yet, herein lies a subtle, deep point.

We understand simply that the way we fix up our elements is through combining them and balancing them with the other elements, and thus it follows that if each element remains separate and unto itself, it remains impaired, and nothing good can be said of this.

But on a deeper understanding, really everything that Hashem created can be used for holiness (if it is permissible according to *Halacha*, that is). This is because it is written, “Know Him in all your ways.” Sometimes, a person is able to make use of any one of the elements even if they are independent of the other elements!

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21 *Shemos Rabbah* 15:20

22 *Kallah Rabbasi*.

## 22 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

Combining each element with the other elements is the usual scenario we must work with, but combining isn't everything. Sometimes we need to take things apart. Hashem created night and day, to show that first there must be night in order for there to be day. Regarding our discussion, first we need to study each of the elements separately and gain from that knowledge – so that we can eventually know how to combine it with the other elements.

We can compare this to knocking down a building in order to build another one its place. Knocking down the building here is not seen as a destruction to the building, but as a necessary prerequisite in the process to what we want to build. The demolishing of the building is actually the beginning. The same way we can understand our elements – in order to be able to combine them, we first need to take them apart and know them each on an individualistic level.

Let us explain what we mean.

In the beginning of the Chapter One, we brought that the inner layer to our *middos* is our *da'as*. There are three parts to our *da'as*.

The first part of our *da'as* is called *da'as hamavdeles*. This is when we take apart all the information, the first step in the process of understanding. The second part of *da'as* is *da'as hamachraas*. This is when we come to a certain point in which we have to decide between the possibilities contained in the information. Or, we come to the point of *da'as hamechaberes*, which is when we combine the information together.

If we don't at first take apart the information, we won't know how to combine all the facts together.

We can see such a concept from the creation of man and woman, who were at first created together, then separated, and then connected back together. First comes a separation, and then comes unification.

Our understanding, our *da'as*, first involves taking apart the information, and then we connect all the facts together.

The only way we can possibly connect the elements together is by first studying each middah separately. We cannot attempt to connect the elements before we first understand each of them on an individual level. Yet if we remain with just this knowledge and we don't come to combine the elements afterwards, we miss the goal. We need to study each element first and learn how to use them, with the intention that we eventually want to combine the elements with each other. This is the method of *tikkun hamiddos*.

The Rambam<sup>23</sup> states that if we want to change a middah, we have to go to its opposite extreme for a while until we improve, which is when we get to the middle level of each middah.

In these words of the Rambam lays the exact fundamental we have described: first we need to go in an extreme path, which is by taking apart the information. Then we need to get to the “middle” path, which is to eventually combine all the elements together. First, we use our *da'as d'havdalah* by separating the information into two different sides, seeing the two extremes, and then we need to use our *da'as hamechaberes* – to see the middle point in between the two extremes, which combines them.

But if a person first wants to get that middle point without having first seen the two extremes, he has nothing to work with in order to combine the information. He won't be able to get to the middle point, the point of balance between all the elements.

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<sup>23</sup> Rambam, *Hilchos De'os*, 2:2



## 23 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

The elements need to be balanced, but before we attempt to balance them all out, we need to first take apart the information about each of the elements and study them each separately. Then, we can connect them together.

We have now emphasized this point more – it is not just that we have to know about each element separately; we have to also know how to use each element separately, before we attempt to balance them out.

### *Holy Laziness*

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Let us return to the topic of this chapter: laziness.

Rav Chaim Vital wrote that laziness is rooted in the element of earth. It seems simply from his words that laziness is an evil trait, that it is always negative.

However, there is a rule that for everything Hashem created that is evil, there is something else good that is equal in strength to it. If something can be used for evil, then there is somehow a way to use it for good. Using laziness for a good reason is the concept known as *atzlus d'kedushah*.

How should we utilize laziness? How can the power to be non-moving ever be a positive thing?

The time to act lazy is when a person is faced with a temptation to sin. He can be lazy about it – and then his laziness becomes holy.

We understand simply (and if only we could indeed reach it) that a person must fear the punishment of sin, which is called *yirah*. Fear of punishment helps a person avoid sin. *Yirah* is a *middah*, and it is rooted in the element of fire. Fire destroys, and a person is afraid to get destroyed by the fire of Gehinnom.

This is a true definition of *yirah*, but there is a deeper kind of *yirah*, and it is rooted in our element of earth. When a person is afraid, he stays put where he is. That is *yirah*. By contrast, *ahavah*/love is the opposite; when a person feels a love for something, he will break all boundaries to get it. “Love pushes the flesh.”<sup>24</sup>

*Yirah* is when a person stays where he is, and he resolves that he is not changing even for any impulse. *Ahavah* is when a person leaves from where he is.

*Yirah* – staying where one is – is rooted in the element of earth. *Chazal* have taught us that when a person is faced with a temptation to sin, one of the ways how he can deal with this is to return to his root of earth – to be unmoving and unchanging, and restrain from the impulse to commit the evil act. This indifference will help a person control his impulse to sin.

This is how we fix up our impaired element of earth – by using laziness for holiness. This was the kind of laziness that the women exercised in not sinning with the Calf. It was the kind of element of earth which Moshe Rabbeinu ground up the Luchos to become fine dust, to show us that we can fix our impaired earth. “Women are lazy” – but it’s a holy laziness.

Holy laziness is that when a person feels an impulse to do something improper, he brings forth his element of earth – the power to be unmoving and unchanging – and then calms the impulse.

Using the Power to Be “Unmoving” For Good Purposes

## 24 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

We find holy laziness in another statement of *Chazal*<sup>25</sup> as well: “The world does not exist except due to the merit of one who restrains his mouth during a time of strife, for it is written, “The world hangs on silence.”

From where does a person get the strength to silence his mouth during an argument?

Simply, it is because *Chazal*<sup>26</sup> say, “Who is strong? The one who conquers his inclination.” A person restrains himself from opening up his mouth to argue. True.

But from the words of *Chazal*, we can see that there is more depth to the matter. A person is called medaber, a “social creature.” Humans have the unique power of speech. By contrast, non-living things do not move, and thus they do not speak. The opposite of speech is silence; “And Aharon was silent.”<sup>27</sup>

What is the power of silence? Where does a person get the strength from to be silent?

It comes from our ability to act non-moving – the doimem in the soul. Silence is demamah in Hebrew, which is related to the word doimem, because being silent and being “non-moving” have a connection.

The power to remain silent during an argument is an ability of holy laziness, which is the power to act non-moving, doimem – the non-moving earth which we were created from.

Although the power of speech defines a human being, who is called medaber - and although we must speak words of Torah - sometimes we need to silence our speech. For example, before one makes the blessing over Torah, he is not allowed to learn (according to most authorities), and on Tisha B'av as well it is forbidden to learn Torah.

Man is called medaber, but we also have in us an opposite ability, the ability to be doimem. It is a power to silence our speech, by awakening our element of earth.

“The world hangs on silence.” When there is separation and strife going on, now is not a time to try to make a connection with the other side; trying to connect to the other side of the argument now will only make things worse and cause even more separation. What should a person do then? He should “sit alone, and be silent”,<sup>28</sup> - he can awaken his element of earth, the power to be unmoving, and then he will find that he has the strength to be silent.

What does it mean to “sit alone”? It does not mean simply to be alone in the physical sense, but to be silent in your own soul. It is a power in the soul to be “alone”, levad. It is when we use our power to be non-moving – the state of our element of earth, when it is independent of the other elements. By using our power to be non-moving, we can reach silence – a complete silence.

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<sup>25</sup> *Chullin* 89a

<sup>26</sup> *Avos* 4:1

<sup>27</sup> *Vayikra* 10:3

<sup>28</sup> This is written in the Torah concerning a metzora, a leper, who has to undergo confinement for seven days as an atonement for his sins.

## 003 | *Laziness, Part Two*

*(Summary: So far, we have learned that our middos/character traits are just the products of our elements, so if we really want to improve our middos, we need to understand our elements that are behind them and then improve those elements. There are four elements – fire, wind, water, and earth. We have started to learn about the lowest element in the soul, earth.*

*We have so far seen one of the natures of earth – to be non-moving and non-changing. This is evil when we act simply lazy, avoiding the mitzvos or to take care of what we need to do.*

*But even laziness can be used for good, like when we act indifferent to an impulse to sin. We can also access our power to be non-moving for good purposes when we are silent during an argument.*

*Now we will study more about the natures of the element of earth, and continue to discuss the middah it produces, laziness.)*

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### ***Laziness Can Be Rooted In Any of the Four Elements***

We have begun to discuss the element of earth, of which the *middah* of laziness stems from.

The truth is that none of the four elements stand alone; each of the elements thrive on each other, and they each have the other elements within them! For example, earth is also made up of some fire, some wind and some water.

If so, from which part in the element of earth does laziness stem from? Is it coming from the “fire” aspect inside earth, the “wind” aspect inside earth, the “water” aspect inside earth – or the “earth” of earth? The simple understanding is that laziness comes from the “earth” of earth, since laziness is the *middah* produced by the element of earth.

But to be sharper, as we mentioned before, the elements stem from each other in a certain order. Wind came first in Creation, and then fire and water were created from wind. From where did earth get created from?

Our Rabbis had two approaches to this. One approach is that the water was made into snow, and then Hashem formed snow into earth. The other approach is that earth was taken from all three of the other elements - fire, wind and water. In either case, earth came last of the elements.

Therefore, if laziness stems from earth, then it is somehow related as well to the other three elements, because earth borrows some traits from the other three elements.

To spell it out more clearly: in the element of earth, we can find in it the earth of earth, the fire of earth, the water of earth, and the wind of earth. Laziness can be rooted in any of these, because since laziness comes from earth, and earth has in it the other three elements as well, we get four distinct kinds of laziness that can manifest in a person.

## 26 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

In the previous chapter, with Hashem's help, we clarified the laziness which comes from the "earth" of earth. Now we will try to understand how laziness can come from either the fire of earth, from the water of earth, and from the wind of earth.

### *Laziness Coming From "Fire" or "Water" of the Earth*

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Earlier, we brought the words of the sage, Rav Moshe Kordovo (the *Remak*), who explains the essence of each of the four elements: fire is hot and dry, wind is cold and moist, earth is dry and cold, and water is hot and moist.

Which element is the opposite of earth? Wind is everything that earth isn't. Earth is dry, while wind is moist. Earth is naturally cold, while wind is naturally warm. So wind is the complete opposite of earth, unlike fire and water which have some natures of earth.

Earth is made up of dryness, which comes from fire. It is also made up of coldness, which comes from water.

Therefore, there is a kind of laziness which can come from either fire or water. Either the laziness is coming from the fire-of-earth, which means that the "dryness" is the source of the laziness; or it can be coming from water-of-earth, which means that the "coldness" is what is causing the laziness.

If both the dryness of fire and the coldness of water are combined, we get complete laziness – the laziness which comes from the earth-of-earth, because earth is a combination of dryness and coldness.

That is the outline of what is to come. Now we will attempt to understand the depth behind this, with the help of Hashem. We will first examine how the laziness is coming from coldness/water, and then we will see how the laziness can be coming from dryness/fire.

### *Earth – Cold and Dry*

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Heat (or warmth) is associated with enthusiasm – when people are enthusiastic for something, they feel warm about it. Enthusiasm creates a warmth – and what brings on enthusiasm? Action.<sup>29</sup> When a person performs an action, he can bring on enthusiasm as he does it, and the enthusiasm results in certain warmth. This is clear and simple – only something active causes warmth; we see this because when something doesn't move, it doesn't become warm.

By contrast, coldness is the source of non-activity. When a person feels a warmth for something, he is active about it, but when he feels cold toward it, he doesn't act. As a result, his coldness breeds on his laziness. Shlomo HaMelech describes the epitome of a lazy person, who doesn't want to leave his house in the winter because it's cold outside<sup>30</sup>; because the lazy person feels cold, he'd rather stay inside the warmth of his home rather than go out into the cold.

Coldness/water is the source of the coldness in the element of earth, so laziness coming from the element of water-of-earth is coming from the coldness of water.

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<sup>29</sup> *Raavad*.

<sup>30</sup> See *Mishlei* 26: 13

## 27 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

There is another kind of laziness, which comes from fire. This laziness comes from the dryness of fire, which is the root of the dryness of earth. Moisture in the soul would cause a person to be active, while dryness in the soul makes it harder to perform.

We can see this from the fact that when a person is enthusiastic about something and then his enthusiasm dries up, it's harder for him to perform. When there is a rush of adrenaline, though – which is really an increase of moisture in the soul – suddenly he finds it easier to get something done. This is human nature. The drier a person feels toward something, the harder it is for him to do it, because he feels cold and indifferent toward it.

However, although the dryness of fire is a recipe to become lazy, fire also contains warmth/enthusiasm, which can be used to make a person become more active and counter the laziness. Water contains coldness, which breeds laziness – but it also has in it moisture, which can also increase the activity. So both earth-of-fire and earth-of-water have in them the possibilities to either increase laziness - or prevent it.

Earth, though, is helpless to deal with laziness. It gets its dryness from fire, and it gets its coldness from water. The combination of dryness and coldness is a complete cause for laziness, because there is nothing here to increase activity. When laziness is coming from earth-in-earth, it is thus the strongest kind of laziness.

### *Laziness Coming From Wind-of-Earth : Wanting To Finish Too Quickly*

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However, as we have mentioned, the root element of all the elements is wind. Let us understand how laziness can also be coming from wind.

We know that earth and wind are complete opposites, as we said before. If so, how can laziness ever be rooted in wind? Earth has in it both the dryness and coldness that come together and produce the complete laziness. Wind is the opposite – it has neither dryness in it nor coldness. It is moist and warm. How, then, can laziness ever come from wind?

To answer this mystery, there is a deep statement of the Kotzker Rebbe zt"l. The Kotzker Rebbe zt"l asked: What is the difference between some who is enthusiastic to do a *mitzvah*, and someone who is too impulsive? Isn't acting with *zerizus* (quickness) a kind of impulsiveness?

He answered that there is a simple difference. A person acting with *zerizus* does the *mitzvah* because he feels dedicated to the task, and thus he is very motivated to get going. But a person who is doing this out of impulsiveness doesn't have this motivation, and he is doing it rather so he can "get it over with" already, and that is why he rushes to do the *mitzvah*.

Creation consists of six days of the week, which is work, and Shabbos, which is *menuchah* (serenity), rest from the work. Both are necessary. Some people have a problem, though – they don't want to work, and they only want rest. Therefore, they'll get all their work done, but only because they want to finish up already so that they can rest already. This isn't *menuchah* - it's laziness.

This problem stems from wind in the soul. Wind that moves too quickly can break things, and such kinds of winds are not desirable. This kind of imbalanced wind results from when a person wants to finish too quickly, even before it's the time to rest.

This is the kind of laziness that comes from wind-of-earth.

## 28 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

However, sometimes a person wants to finish too quickly for a different reason that we have said. For example, it could be he doesn't know how much time he is supposed to take out to do something, and therefore he wants to finish already, because he didn't know it would take so long. This isn't laziness.

We are discussing someone who is acting quickly because he wants to finish already so he can return to his laziness, which is a problem that stems from earth-of-wind. (It can either be coming from earth-of-wind, or wind-of-earth).

(However, there is another kind of laziness which can be rooted in wind, and it called *leitzanus*, scoffing, a trait stemming from wind. A scoffer is someone who talks inappropriately about comes to make fun of serious matters. What is really happening in his soul as he does this? His power of speech loses its vitality, and then his inner movements cease, which causes him to become non-moving and thus lazy.

On an even more subtle note, laziness can come from wind as follows. There are four directions of the world, which are called the four "winds" (*arba ruchos*) of the world, and they each oppose each other when they cross paths. The opposing winds from each direction then weaken each other, and when the movements weaken, the result is non-movement, which is laziness).

Thus, laziness in the simple sense comes from earth, but when we have the deeper understanding we have learned here, laziness can come from either fire, water or wind. So there is laziness which comes from earth-of-earth, water-of-earth, fire-of-earth or wind-of-earth.

Laziness which comes from earth-of-earth is when a person is unmoving, and it is the total laziness, because the person doesn't move at all. (This was dealt with in the previous chapter).

Laziness which comes from water-of-earth is when a person is cold and indifferent towards doing something, which will make him do things slowly. (It is not as slow-moving as the laziness of earth-of-earth, because at least the person is still moving. But it is still a form of laziness.)

Laziness which comes from fire-of-earth contains some more movement than one has laziness of water-of-earth, because here the person will still act a little faster than the one has laziness from water-of-earth. This is because his fire will increase warmth towards the action and get him to be more active.

Laziness coming from wind-of-earth, though, is a subtler, deeper kind of laziness, because the person is acting quickly, and it seems that he isn't lazy at all. But although this is the quickest moving person than the above three kinds, it's still a form of laziness, as we explained.

We have thus seen how laziness can come from each of the four elements.

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### ***Another Root Cause for Laziness: Lacking True Wisdom***

To complete this discussion, we will mention that there can be an additional root cause for laziness, besides for what we said until now.

## 29 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

Shlomo HaMelech says, “Go to an ant, lazy one, and see her ways and you will become wise.”<sup>31</sup> Shlomo HaMelech is advising a lazy person to improve himself by observing an ant, who moves quickly to do its tasks.

This is odd. If Shlomo HaMelech is trying to help the lazy person stop being lazy, why doesn't he tell him how to act with *zerizus*, enthusiasm? Why is he instead telling him to learn wisdom from the ant? Is that what his problem is – that he's not wise enough? Ask a lazy person why he's not getting things done; it's not because he has formed an erroneous belief in his head that he must act lazy. He is simply complaining, “I just don't have the energy...” Fine, that's his problem – he's simply being lazy! So why are we telling him that he needs to become wiser?

The lazy person might know good and well that he's lazy. His problem doesn't seem to be that he's not wise enough – it would seem that his problem is just that he's feeling heavy, a dominant trait of earth.

However, Shlomo HaMelech has taught us here that there is an additional root to laziness: **he's lacking wisdom.**

Rashi<sup>32</sup> equates laziness with foolishness. Laziness – and foolishness – have a lot to do with each other. Why?

The depth of this is because a person has a soul and a body. The soul itself – the *neshamah* – has no element of earth in it, and it has no trace of laziness in it. The four elements are only applicable to the **physical, bodily** part of our existence, just as the physical world is made up of the four elements. Laziness, which is rooted in the element of earth, is rooted in the **body** – not in the soul.

This is the meaning of the statement of *Chazal* we brought earlier, “Women are lazy.” Man is generally called *neshamah* (soul), while woman is generally called *guf* (body). Chavah, the first woman, was created from Adam's body – to be even more precise, she was created from the rib, which is called “*tzela*” in Hebrew, a word which has the same letters as “*atzel*”, “lazy one.”<sup>33</sup>

Laziness is thus rooted in the body, while the ability to act comes from our soul. The angels are praised for their energy (*Tehillim 103: 20*), because they are totally spiritual and thus energetic. The soul in us, our spirituality, also contains the source of our ability to act energetically. It is only the heavy nature of the body which allows for laziness, because the body is “*dirt, from the ground.*”

This shows us that all laziness is really a sign that one has abandoned his soul. The more we shine the light of the soul upon ourselves, the less of a hold our body has on us, and we will chip away at the body's laziness.

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<sup>31</sup> Mishlei 6:6

<sup>32</sup> Kerisos 18b

<sup>33</sup> The author here does not mean, *chas v'shalom* (G-d forbid), to offend any women with this; and certainly *Chazal* did not intend to make fun of women in saying that “Women are lazy.” There are many such similar statements in *Chazal* which, when not understood properly, can be taken in the wrong way, these matters have to be understood and explained well by a competent Torah authority, just like all of Torah. It also cannot be that women are seen as having more negative traits than men, because there are plenty of statements in *Chazal* as well concerning the problems unique to men, which their women counterparts do not have. In addition, it is written in the famous “*Aishes Chayil*” liturgy (Proverbs 31:1), “An accomplished woman, who can find? Far beyond pearls is her value”, which extolls the values of a G-d fearing woman. Women are also praised by the Sages as having more spiritual depth and intuitiveness (“*binah yesairah*”).

Yet, how are we to reconcile the seeming contradiction that on one hand, women are seen as more physically inclined than men (as they were created from man's body), while on the other hand women are praised as having more spiritual depth than men? One explanation we can supply here is that the author has stated in a number of his talks that “man” and “woman” does not have to refer to “men” and “women” specifically, but rather that to the parts in our soul which are “masculine” or “feminine”, thus even a woman can exercise the natural powers of a man, and a man can exercise the natural qualities of a woman, in terms of our soul. See “Getting To Know Your Thoughts”, Chapter Nine (available at the Bilvavi website).

## 30 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

We have seen here another way how one's element of earth can become dominant: besides for a lack of balance in the elements, it can also be because the soul's light isn't being exercised. The intellect of the soul – *seichel* – is called *seichel d'kedushah*, holy intellect; the wisdom of Torah is essentially the wisdom of the soul. The more we reveal our soul – by learning the Torah's wisdom – the more we distance laziness from ourselves.

Torah scholars are constantly moving, from one spiritual plateau to the next<sup>34</sup>. This is because they are constantly connected to the light of their soul, and the soul moves. They are disconnected from the darkness of the physical body, which is the root of laziness.

If so, the power of wisdom (*chochmah*) is the solution to laziness. In turn, laziness is the antithesis to *chochmah*, the wisdom of the soul – Torah. That is why Shlomo HaMelech tells the lazy person to go learn wisdom from an ant, because if he gains wisdom, he will be able to leave his body's hold and let the soul's light shine. When one exits the body's hold, now he can perform, because he isn't being weighed down anymore by the body's heaviness.

We have altogether seen five causes for laziness: earth-of-earth, water-of-earth, fire-of-earth, wind-of-earth, and a lack of *chochmah*.

### ***Stopping Evil Desires Through Holy Laziness***

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If the earth in the soul has become dominant, then it must mean that it has overpowered the water, wind, and fire in one's soul.

As we brought earlier from the words of Rav Chaim Vital, desire is rooted in water. A lazy person, whose earth has become dominant, has weakened the water in his soul due to his strong earthiness, and as a result, his water/desires have weakened.

Earlier, we explained how the power to be non-moving can be a holy kind of laziness. Now we will add onto this point – we will see how this power can be used to eliminate evil desires. When earth dominates the water of the soul, the water gets colder due to the earth's presence, which is cold. It also dries up some of the water, because earth is dry. In doing so, earth can weaken evil desires, which are rooted in water.

Fire as well can be used to eliminate evil desires. Fire is hot and dry, and fire can be a root cause as well for evil desires, due to its warmth (which is a factor in increasing evil desire, because the heat in the action increases one's excitement towards the action). Earth increases the dryness of fire, (which was already dry to begin with and now becomes even more dry due to the increase of earth), but at the same time it weakens the heat of the fire, since it is cold. What will happen? The evil desires will lose its heat and excitement, because the desire has been cooled.

We have just seen now how evil desires can be eliminated – using the power of holy laziness, which can be used to dry up the moisture of a water-rooted desire, or to cool off the heat of a fire-rooted desire.

As we explained before, the essence of laziness is to be non-moving, and this power can be put to good uses when we use non-movement to refrain either from a sin or from anything improper. Now we have just learned how to use earth to eliminate evil desires which come either from water of fire – by using its coldness (which stops desires from fire) or by using its dryness (which stops desires from water).

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<sup>34</sup> *Berachos 64a*



## 31 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

The same goes for the converse problem, in which a person's earth has become imbalanced, resulting in laziness. If we increase the warmth (fire) and the moisture (water), we balance out the earth, and this is the root of how he we fix an impaired element of earth. This is with regards to correcting the kinds of laziness which stem from fire or water. But if we want correct the total kind of laziness, which is laziness that comes from earth-of-earth, then we need to use wind. Earth is non-moving, while wind is all about movement.

### *The Three Main Evil Traits, According to the Vilna Gaon*

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In order to go deeper into this topic, we will try to make the matter more clear, and for this, we need the following brief introduction.

According to the Vilna Gaon<sup>35</sup>, there are three roots of evil in a person: anger (which is from fire), desire (which is from water), and *leitzanus*, scoffing (which is from wind).<sup>36</sup> Anger is rooted in fire. Does anger come from the dryness in a fire, or from the heat in a fire? We would simply answer that anger has to do with the heat of fire, and that a person who loses his temper is having an outpouring of his fire. But this isn't correct, and let us explain why.

We brought from Rav Chaim Vital that fire is the root of two traits: anger, and *gaavah*/conceit. Conceit comes from the heat of fire – while anger comes from the dryness of fire. How do we know this?

When a person is conceited, he enjoys the feeling. However, when a person is angry, he doesn't find this to be enjoyable at all. This shows us that conceit stems from the heat of fire, which is life-giving, while anger stems from the dryness of fire.

“An angry person has nothing in his hands except anger.”<sup>37</sup> When a person loses his temper, he breaks things, and the meaning behind this is because he feels no vitality, just dryness – and because he has run out of vitality, he breaks things. Dryness in the soul prevents a person from rising spiritually, descending him to the lowest element – earth.

Desires comes from water in the soul. Which aspect of water does desire come from – from the moisture in the water, or from the coldness in water? Clearly, it comes from the moisture of water, because coldness is the antithesis to desire. Only a warmth towards something can cause a person to have a desire – no one ever gets a desire for something when he feels cold about it. So anger comes from the dryness of fire, while desires come from the moisture of water.

*Leitzanus*/scoffing comes from wind, because scoffing is speech, which is rooted in wind. We see this from the fact that man had a *ruach memalelah* (talking spirit) breathed into him, so speech comes from *ruach*/wind. What is this *ruach memalelah*, from which *leitzanus* stems from?

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35 *Gra, Mishlei 1:11*

36 *Author's Note: Leitzanus is when a person talks inappropriately and comes to say things that are meaningless. In essence, leitzanus is to take something that exists and speak about in a way that negates its existence. Why? The existence of something depends on the honor and importance we give it. Leitzanus is the antitheses to honor, because by making fun of someone, the person is belittling his honor. The evil nation of Amalek is known for its negative trait of leitzanus – they came to attack the Jews precisely after Aharon died, when the Shechinah left; in other words, they attacked when honor had left us, hinting to their leitzanus.*

37 *Kiddushin 40b*

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A scoffer comes to belittle something with his words, so his words themselves are considered belittled and worthless. His words are empty from dignity. His element of wind is impaired – when wind doesn't connect with the other elements, it becomes *devarim betailim*, idle speech – words that are considered worthless. (We will explain this more, with the help of Hashem, when we get to explaining the element of wind). These are three general evil traits in a person – anger, evil desire, and scoffing.

### ***Amalek: A Combination of Esav and Yishmael***

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All of this is an introduction about *leitzanus*/scoffing. We will explain. In *sefarim hakedoshim*, it is brought that Avraham Avinu personifies the element of water when it has been totally elevated. Yishmael is the root of evil water. Yitzchok Avinu is the root of the elevated element of fire, while Esav is evil fire. Yaakov Avinu is the elevated element of wind.

From Avraham Avinu came “water” that is only cold – Yishmael. Yishmael is the root of evil laziness, which comes from the coldness of water. From Yitzchok Avinu came a ruined fire, a “fire” that was only dry – Esav. Esav is the root of the evil laziness which comes from the dryness of fire. The nation of Amalek is a combination of the evil inherent in both Esav and Yishmael.<sup>38</sup> Amalek has both evils – it has dryness and coldness. It thus represents the total laziness, the laziness which comes from earth-of-earth.

In addition to this, Amalek's power is that they represent a combination of the heat of fire and the moisture of water to produce its evil trait, *leitzanus*. Where can we see this?

Amalek is called “*A rebellious one, an arrogant one, a scoffer is his name.*”<sup>39</sup> Anger/evil fire/Esav is one extreme, while desires/evil water/Yishmael are on the other extreme, with *leitzanus* being in between the two extremes. In other words, Amalek combines the negative aspects of both fire and water, and this gives birth to *leitzanus*.

Amalek uses not only the element of earth to do this, but also the element of wind. Earth combines dryness of fire with coldness of water, while wind combines heat of fire with moisture of water. When dryness of fire and coldness of water are combined, evil earth is produced. Amalek connects the fire and water using the coldness in the water, and this we can see from what is written by Amalek, “*who met you along the way*” – the word *korcha*, “met you”, comes from the word *kerirus* – coldness. When Amalek combines fire and water using wind, it does so using its trait of *gaavah*/conceit. Amalek is personified with the trait of *gaavah*, since they are called “*The first of the nations, Amalek*”, hinting to their conceit. Amalek combines the heat of fire with the moisture in water.

The Hebrew word for “lazy” is *atzel*, which contains in it the letters of the word *letz* – a scoffer. This shows us that laziness not only can come from a combination of fire and water, but from *leitzanus* as well, which is rooted in wind. There are seventy nations (besides for the Jewish people) – Yishmael and Esav are the two root nations, with Amalek being the root of these two.<sup>40</sup> Amalek combines the dryness of fire and the coldness of water to produce its *leitzanus*, and it also produces *leitzanus* by combining the heat of fire with the moisture of water, creating wind/scoffing/idle speech.

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<sup>38</sup> Zohar II: 120b

<sup>39</sup> Mishlei 21: 24

<sup>40</sup> See Gra to Yeshayahu 11:1

### 33 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

Laziness, when it is complete, is a combination of all the worst traits found in the world! It includes *leitzanus*, which is evil wind, and it contains as well dryness/evil fire and coldness/evil water.

#### ***The Correction for Laziness: Become Close to Hashem***

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We have explained until now, with much *siyata d'shmaya*, the root concept of laziness - how it stems from each of the four elements, and how it can come from an absence of the soul's light (which is a lack of *chochmah*/Torah wisdom), as well as how we can balance it out through the other elements.

To complete this topic, we will mention another remedy to laziness – a higher form of a remedy than anything we have said until now. It will not apply to most people, but it is worth mentioning so we can complete the picture here.

Hashem created the world with 22 letters of the *Aleph Beis*. The first letter is *aleph*, but at the beginning of Creation, the actual root of Creation wasn't even yet revealed. For this reason, the Torah only began with the second letter, *beis* (*Beraishis*). At the giving of the Torah, however, the root of Creation became revealed, and then the Torah began with *aleph* – the first letter of the Ten Commandments was *aleph*, in the word “*Anochi*”.

Let us explain what we are talking about out. When something in Creation becomes corrected, the rule is that it must return to the letter *aleph*, a hint to Hashem – who is the *Alufo shel olam*, “Ruler of the world.” By contrast, any ruination comes from a disconnection and distance from the letter *aleph*. When a ruination of any concept occurs, its *aleph* is damaged, and it becomes instead the letter *ayin*.

We can see an example of this from the words of *Chazal* that Hashem made Adam with *kosnos ohr*, protective skins to protect him from damage. Before the sin, the Torah spells the word “skin” with an *aleph* in the word “*ohr*.” After the sin, the spelling of the word *ohr* in the Torah is changed from *aleph* to *ayin*, to show that the *aleph* became demoted to *ayin*. This is a rule – when a ruination (*kilkul*) occurs, it causes *aleph* to become *ayin* – and when a correction (*tikkun*) occurs, it returns the *ayin* to its source, *aleph*.

This applies to our discussion about laziness, as follows. Laziness is really a disconnection from the *Alufo shel Olam*, the Ruler of the world – Hashem. The way to fix laziness – which is *atzel*, spelled with an *ayin* - is to turn its letter *ayin* into an *aleph*, which is the word “*aitzel*” – which means “near”, a hint to how one has to become “near Hashem”, close to Hashem.

This is the secret of fixing laziness. How does a person accomplish this?

The element of earth, which is heavy, is responsible for laziness. Any action we do on this world is somewhat heavy, because since everything on the world is made up of the four elements, everything has some earth/heaviness in it. But when Hashem made the world, He had no laziness – respectively so. His Creation was, of course, an act that contained no laziness.

If so, a person needs to reach a situation in which there is no laziness. How can one do this? We will explain.

We mentioned two ways so far to fix laziness. One way is by balancing out the four elements, and the second way is by getting in touch with our soul, which can shine its wisdom onto our body's laziness. There is a third, higher way – to connect ourselves to Hashem's handiwork, which is absent from any heaviness/laziness. (We will explain more what this is.)

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*Chazal* say that there are certain actions one can do which make him a “partner in Creation” – for example, when one recites *Kiddush* on Friday Night with concentration. What is the depth behind this?

The actions that a human performs on this world are always somewhat heavy, due to our materialism. Hashem, however, does things which contain no heaviness in them, for His actions are perfect, and nothing holds Him back. “He is a true Worker, for His actions are truthful.”

What we mean from all this is that if we truly connect to the Creator, we can merit a total correction to laziness.

We do not mean that it is unnecessary to use the previous methods we brought. Rather, we are saying that there are three parts to the process of fixing laziness. First, we need to balance out our element of earth with the other elements, as we explained before; then we need to reveal wisdom, which is by getting in touch with our soul (through learning the wisdom of Torah). Finally, we must attach ourselves more to Hashem.

If a person only does the first part of fixing laziness (and if only we should do even this), and even if he has shined his soul onto his body (this too, if only we should all merit it) – one’s laziness still hasn’t yet been completely fixed. The true correction to laziness can only occur when one is really connected with Hashem – he stops being “*atzel*” (lazy) and is instead “*aitzel*”, “near Hashem.”

### *Connecting To Hashem, Via Prayer*

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The *Gemara* states that one should not pray if he is in a sad or lazy mood.<sup>41</sup> Let us explain this matter as it pertains to us. *Chazal* say that “prayer does half”.<sup>42</sup> Prayer gets us halfway through what we need to do. And who does the other half? The Creator.

It’s not that I do “my” part, and the Creator does “His” part, and that we have no connection, like when you send one of your children to the store to buy bread and another to buy milk. If “prayer does half”, then it means that we are becoming a partner with Hashem in this.

How can it be that one becomes “a partner in Creation”? Hashem has no element of earth, while humans do have an element of earth! If so, how does a human work together with Hashem to become a partner in Creation?

For this, *Chazal* teach us that one must not pray if he is in a lazy mood. In other words, when one prays as he’s lazy, his prayers are mixed with the element of earth, and he won’t be able to connect to Hashem’s work. His prayers will not accomplish his half of the job. Only when a person is connecting to Hashem and he is not being held back by his element of earth, can his prayers do half the job.

If someone is lacking *chochmah*/Torah wisdom, or if he lacks a balance in his elements, then on him it can be said the statement in *Chazal*, “One who is lazy to give eulogy over a Torah scholar deserves to be buried alive.”<sup>43</sup> The depth behind this statement is that a Torah scholar has increased his wisdom over his body’s hold, while a lazy person who hasn’t eulogized the Torah scholar has basically remained at his element of earth – and a person is buried in the earth.

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<sup>41</sup> *Berachos 31a*

<sup>42</sup> *Yalkut Shimeoni, Tzav, 512.*

<sup>43</sup> *Shabbos 105b*

## 35 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

A person is buried after he dies, but a lazy person (in this case, one who did not eulogize a Torah scholar) is considered to be buried alive – he failed to connect to *chochmah*, and instead chose to be connected to his element of earth.

### *Holy “Earth” - Shabbos*

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Finally, there is an even higher way to correct laziness/earth. The most complete way to fix our element of earth is through Shabbos. On Shabbos, we abstain from labor. It is a holy kind of earth/non-movement.

This is a deeper kind of earth than what we have discussed until now. Until now, we only discussed how to work with our natural element of earth – the heaviness within which produces laziness, which we discussed how it can also be used for holiness. An example we gave of this was to hold back from speaking in front of someone greater, which is how we can exercise the power of non-movement for holiness.

We described two ways of fixing that lower element of earth. One way is through balancing out our earth through the other elements, and the higher way is through elevating the element of earth. Either way involves our natural kind of earth – the kind that weighs us down when we don’t fix it.

But there is another, higher kind of earth in us, and it is completely holy – it is the kind of earth Hashem used to create the world with. Hashem did not use a “heavy” kind of earth, but a whole different kind of earth. *Chazal* say that all earth in existence, even the sun, comes from earth and will eventually return to earth.<sup>44</sup> This is “holy” earth – and it is actually the secret of Shabbos. Shabbos comes from the word “*sheves*”, to return – on Shabbos, all of Creation returns to its root, and thus there is rest. This is the holy, perfect kind of earth/non-movement. Even more so, we abstain from work on Shabbos, which is the deeper kind of rest – reflecting how Hashem rested on Shabbos.<sup>45</sup>

Let us expand a little more upon what we are saying.

Until now, we only dealt with the lower kind of earth in us, which needs to be balanced with our other elements; we discussed how we fix an impaired element of earth. But that is all the lower kind of earth. Now, we are speaking of a spiritual kind of earth – holy earth (*afar d’kedushah*).

Whenever we speak of the four elements (in this *sefer*), we are speaking about the **physical elements** (which stem from our body, the outermost layer of our soul), not the spiritual elements (which are deeper within our soul). For example, heaviness is a nature of earth, but only our materialistic earth contains heaviness.

Shabbos, however, is also the element of earth – but it is completely holy, and it is not the element of earth we have been discussing until now. (We will digress from discussing the usual four elements that this *sefer* comes to explain, which are the lower elements, and describe one of the higher elements – the spiritual element of earth, Shabbos, which is completely holy.)

From where can we get the holy kind of earth – Shabbos, which is a total abstaining from work?

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<sup>44</sup> *Beraishis Rabbah* 12: 11

<sup>45</sup> *Yerushalmi Shabbos* 15:3

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The element of earth is not meant to be just for itself. Its purpose is to act as a container for the other three elements. Earth is meant to nurture the other elements and build them. When earth isn't serving to help the other elements develop, the earth isn't doing anything – and that is its downfall, because it isn't fulfilling its purpose. The way is to fix it is by giving it balance, which will allow the earth to produce balanced movements. That is the purpose of our **materialistic** element of earth.

But our **holy** element of earth – Shabbos – is for a completely different purpose: to simply rest.

During the six days of the week, we use our materialistic element of earth, which needs to become fixed and perfected. We need to work with it in order to do this. But on Shabbos, work is forbidden – “All your work is done.”<sup>46</sup>

The depth behind why work is forbidden on Shabbos is because work implies that something here is lacking and needs to get fixed. Shabbos is to be inactive from any work, because since all the work is considered done on Shabbos, there is no necessity to work – nothing is lacking. This is holy earth – an absence of work, due to the fact that there is perfection here, with nothing lacking.

During the week, we can fix our element of earth by working with it. This helps us go from “*atzel*” to “*aitzel*” – to connect to Hashem. But we have a higher mission than this as well: after the weekdays comes Shabbos, which is the deeper kind of earth, the ability to be non-active for a holy reason. We are inactive on Shabbos because this reflects closeness to Hashem – Who lacks nothing. This is the source of all holy laziness – I'm not doing anything, because I already have everything.

Understandably, one should not live with this concept all the time and adapt an erroneous attitude that he must never do anything - *chas v'shalom!* We are only referring to Shabbos, in which a person can reach a deep, inner chamber of his heart and reach the holiest laziness. Each person, according to his own level, can reach it.

As soon as Shabbos ends, we must return to the six days of the week – and we return to this world of action, each according to his respective situation in life (and then we have to work with our regular kind of earth, balancing it out as we have learned here).

This deep power – to be totally inactive, from a feeling of contentment – is the ultimate holy kind of laziness; but it is only meant to be accessed for a temporary amount of time, and that is what Shabbos is for. We are meant to connect to this holy laziness on Shabbos, and then to return to action – carrying out the 613 *mitzvos* we are obligated in, which involve action.

During those moments of utter connection with Hashem through the holy laziness of Shabbos, we resemble in some way the *Kohen Gadol* (high priest) in the *Kodesh HaKodashim* (Holy of Holies), who had a complete connection with the Creator then. It is an inner place in the soul which a person can return to, where laziness becomes holy – entirely a *Kodesh HaKodashim*.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Yalkut Shimeoni Yisro 296*

<sup>47</sup> *Editor's Summary of Chapters 1-2: So far, we have learned about one of the natures of earth, which is to be non-moving. When a person is non-moving and indifferent to mitzvos or his various responsibilities, we call this evil laziness.*

*Evil laziness can be fixed in three stages. Step One is by increasing our element of wind/movement. Step Two is to access the light of our soul, which is attained with the more Torah wisdom we learn. Step Three is to connect more to Hashem – via prayer.*

## 37 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

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*Laziness can be holy when we use it to overcome evil desires (water) and passions (fire), or when we use it to overcome haste (wind). This uses the power of non-movement for holiness.*

*There is a higher kind of earth, accessed through the holy laziness of Shabbos, which is when we connect to the contentment we are supposed to feel on Shabbos that we don't work. This feeling of contentment is not supposed to be used during the week, but only on Shabbos.*

004 | *Eliminating Sadness*<sup>48</sup>

The meanings of the word “Atzvus”

Let us give a general introduction to this chapter.

The Hebrew word “atzvus” we simply understand to mean as “the emotion of sadness”, to feel sad in our heart. But the truth is that in the words of our Sages, there are many meanings to the word atzvus. First we will list all the different meanings of atzvus we find in *Chazal*, and then we will examine each of them.

Besides for “sadness”, atzvus can also mean “pain”. By Chavah, it is written in the Torah, “Increasingly great will be your pains (of pregnancy) and your labor; with pain (etzev) shall you bear children.” *Chazal*<sup>49</sup> say that the curse given to Chavah after the sin was that she would have pain in child-rearing, which is called etzev in the possuk. From here we see that etzev (the same root letters as the word atzvus) means “pain”.

Atzvus can also mean “exertion.” Adam was cursed in that he would have to work hard in order to eat – “With exertion (it’zavon) shall you eat.” The word itzavon (exertion) is another usage of the word atzvus, so we see that atzvus can also mean “exertion.”

Atzvus can also mean “mourning.” When Hashem decided he would bring the Flood upon mankind, the possuk also uses the term of atzvus<sup>50</sup>: “Va-yisat’zev Hashem el libo” (“He was sad in His heart”). Rashi explains that Hashem was in mourning over the destruction to His handiwork. From here we see that atzvus can also mean “mourning.”

Atzvus can also mean “exhaustion”. When Noach was born, the generation proclaimed, “This one will comfort us from our actions, and from the “itzavon” (exhaustion) of our hands.”<sup>51</sup> Targum Onkelos says that itzavon here means exhaustion; so atzvus can also mean “exhaustion.”

Atzvus can also mean “constricted”. The Sages describe an exact measurement as “amah atzavah”, using the word of etzev to mean “constricted.”

It can also mean to give structure (“itzuv”) and it can also mean a form of idol-worship (“atzavim”).

There are even more meanings we find to the word atzvus, but this is the general description, and now we will reflect into each of these meanings, one by one.

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### ***Laziness and Sadness Have the Same Root***

<sup>48</sup> For more on how we can remove our sadness, see the author’s series *Da Es Yichudecha*, “Getting To Know Your Inner World,” chapters 13-19.

<sup>49</sup> *Eruvin* 100b

<sup>50</sup> *Beraishis* 6:6

<sup>51</sup> *Beraishis* 5: 29



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Rav Chaim Vital writes that laziness and sadness have the same root: earth. There is proof to this from many instances in the words of our Sages where laziness and sadness appear together.

For example, “The Shechinah<sup>52</sup> does not reside when there is sadness or when there is laziness.”<sup>53</sup> We also find in the words of our Sages, “One should not pray if he is in a sad mood, or if he is in a lazy mood...only with rejoicing of a mitzvah.”<sup>54</sup>

Many times the Sages as well connect sadness with laziness, like we find that the Shechinah cannot be present when there is sadness and laziness<sup>55</sup>; also, it is forbidden to daven if one is sad or lazy.<sup>56</sup>

Even the Hebrew words for laziness and sadness are similar: sadness, which means etzev, is similar to the word atzel (lazy one), with exception to the letters beis and lamed. The letters beis and lamed form the word lev – heart -- because both sadness and laziness have to do with a problem in the heart.<sup>57</sup>

To be even more specific, Rav Chaim Vital also writes that the element of earth is the root of sadness, and it results in laziness; thus, sadness branches out into laziness.<sup>58</sup>

We have explained before how the four elements differ: fire is warm and dry, wind is warm and wet, water is cold and wet, and earth is dry and cold. The coldness in earth comes from water, and the dryness of earth comes from fire; and to be more specific, the dryness of fire is rooted in earth.

Sadness and laziness are rooted in thus earth, which is dry and cold. Laziness comes from the coldness in earth (which resembles Amalek, who induced laziness into our people by “cooling” us off), while sadness comes from the dryness in one’s element of earth.

Just like laziness can come from any of the three elements (fire, water and wind) present in the earth, so can sadness be rooted in any of the three elements in the earth. There is thus sadness which comes from fire, water or wind that is present in the element of earth.

First, we will examine the sadness that comes from the earth-of-earth.

### ***Sadness That Comes From Earth-of-Earth***

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Laziness and sadness have similarities. Before, we explained that there are two kinds of laziness: laziness that is rooted in non-movement, and laziness of moving slowly. Both kinds of laziness are rooted in the earth, which doesn’t move.

The same two types of laziness— total non-movement, and moving slowly – are also two types of sadness.

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<sup>52</sup> *The Holy Presence of G-d*

<sup>53</sup> *Shabbos 30b*

<sup>54</sup> *Berachos 31a*

<sup>55</sup> *Shabbos 30b*

<sup>56</sup> *Berachos 31a*

<sup>57</sup> *This is of course referring to the spiritual heart, not the physical heart.*

<sup>58</sup> *Author’s Note: Sefer Tanya, however, writes that laziness is the root of sadness, and it is noteworthy to look into the difference of opinion here.*

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In total non-movement, a person is sad because there is a lack of vitality; when there is a lack of vitality, there is a lack of expansion and movement in the soul. There can only be vitality to a person when he has movement. Sadness is thus a form of non-movement (and its most dramatic example is death), and when this non-movement is total, that causes a sadness that is total.

Another kind of sadness is when one has a slow amount of movement. This is when one's element of earth becomes imbalanced and causes a person to feel somewhat heavy, and he feels lethargic. When a person is sad, he feels a sort of inner heaviness, and he moves very slowly.

Fire is warm and dry. Really, the dryness in a fire should cause it to descend, but the warmth in fire gives it vitality to ascend. Earth, by contrast, has no warmth, and is left with its dryness. What happens? It doesn't ascend, and when the earth gets heavy, it descends even lower. When this happens in a person's soul, a person comes to feel sad.

(Fire by nature ascends, while water descends. If so, why doesn't water in the soul cause sadness, since it also causes a descent? The answer to this is because water descends in order to sustain. When a person descends in order to sustain others, he doesn't feel sad - he is happy. We find this by a Rebbi, who descends from his level in order to teach his student. Earth, however, falls because of its heaviness, and not in order to nourish. This is why an increase of earth in the soul causes sadness.)

### *Sadness that Comes from Water-of-Earth*

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We can also find a sadness which comes from the water-of-earth. How do we see this? There are many ways how this happens, but basically, this was the entire sin of Adam: Adam desired to eat from the fruit of the forbidden tree, and because he sinned, he was cursed with sadness. Desire comes from water of the soul, so we see that the element of water in the soul can be an indirect cause for sadness.

After Adam and Chavah sinned, they were demoted to the level of earth; Adam was cursed with, "You are earth, and to earth you shall return", while Chavah was cursed with the pains of pregnancy and childbirth, which are called *etzev* (sadness).

Desire, which is rooted in water, brings a person down to the earth – which causes a person to be sad. Why?

Desire itself is not a bad middah; there is no such thing as a bad middah. A person can have holy desires, like desiring a relationship with Hashem and desiring the Beis HaMikdash to be rebuilt. But when a person desires materialistic enjoyment, he becomes sad, because since all materialism is rooted in earth brings him down to the level of the earth.

When a person has a desire, it isn't possible for him to enjoy it unless he uses his element of earth. When a person wants to connect with the pleasure in something physical, like food, he connects to his earthiness and materialism. What happens? "When a person wants a hundred, he wants two hundred." Materialistic desires thus cause a person to become attached to his earthiness, and this makes a person sad.

This is why Adam was cursed with "Earth you are, and to earth you shall return." Because he desired to eat from the tree, that itself brought him down to the earth.

This is how the water-of-earth can be a cause for sadness: desires for materialism.

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Sadness that comes from Wind-of-Earth

Sometimes sadness can also be rooted in the wind-of-earth as well. How can we see this?

In Sefer Tanya<sup>59</sup> it is brought that when a person feels haughty, he becomes sad. Haughtiness in Hebrew is called “gas ruach” – to have a haughty spirit, which can also read to “have a wide amount of wind.” When a person is haughty, he feels that he is more exalted than others. What will happen when he discovers that this middah of his is causing him to run into problems in his life and in his encounters with others? He will become sad.

What is the internal process behind how this works? When one’s element of earth doesn’t equal his amount of wind in the soul, he becomes sad, because he’s missing the earth that can keep him more grounded. The higher and better a person thought he was than others, the sadder he will become, because the fall will be harder when he realizes what he’s done to himself.

This is caused by the wind in one’s earth; let us point out that it is not the element of wind itself in the soul that is causing the sadness, but rather the wind within one’s element of earth. This is how wind-of-earth can cause sadness.

### ***Sadness that comes from Fire-of-Earth***

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Where do we see that fire within earth can also cause sadness?

Fire is hot and dry, while earth is cold and dry. Laziness comes from the coldness of earth, and sadness comes from the dryness of earth. The dryness of fire is what is responsible for the sadness in a person that comes from the earth. How?

Fire itself wouldn’t cause sadness, because the warmth in the fire can counter the dryness. If this warmth would get removed, though, we would be left with coldness and dryness. This would enable a person’s dryness to be dominant, and it would make a person become lazy.

When a person is angry, it is also a kind of sadness. Yosef told his brothers, “Do not be sad and do not be angry with each other.” Anger is rooted in the element of fire, so here we see that fire can be a cause for sadness.

Anger and sadness are related because they have the same root: dryness. Anger comes from the dryness of fire, while sadness comes from the dryness of earth – or it can come from the dryness in fire.

Sadness From Melancholy, Which Is In The Spleen

In our body, we can also find how sadness manifests.

The Zohar says that sadness is found in one’s body – in the spleen. The spleen contains the bile, and there are four kinds of bile: white, red, green, and black. Melancholy is called marah shechorah – “black bile.” A person is melancholy through his spleen.

There are four primary colors in Creation: white, red, green and black. They are manifested in the four elements. Water is white, because it is clear. Fire is red. Wind is green (this is a separate discussion, not for now). Earth is black (although we can find earth that is white, the main kind of earth is black).

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<sup>59</sup> Tanya: Chapter 27; see also (as well as in sefer Imrei Pinchos: Middos: 10: 20 in the name of Reb Pinchos of Koritz zt”l)

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Thus, atzvus, sadness, is called marah shechorah – melancholy.

### *Sadness Causes Exertion and Sleep*

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Now that we have explained how sadness can come from the four elements, we can proceed to the next step, with the help of Hashem.

As we said in the beginning of this chapter, atzvus (which usually means sadness) has many meanings. One of its other meanings is ameilus – exertion.

When a person exerts himself, this does not come from any of the three active elements of fire, wind or water. Ameilus, which comes from the word neelam – “hidden” – is a “hidden” force, because it comes from the “hidden” element (earth). The other elements aren’t hidden – fire is lit up, wind is out in the open, and water is clear. But earth is hidden away. Thus, exertion comes from an increase of earth in the soul.

The other three elements are light, while earth is heavy. Fire moves quickly, wind moves even more quickly, and water naturally flows quickly. Earth is a heavy element, so an increase of earth in the soul causes a person to feel exerted.

Exerting oneself comes from the dryness and coldness in earth. For this reason, a person feels fatigued when he feels that something is hard for him to do. On a more subtle note, it is because he feels like he lacks vitality, and when there is a lack of vitality, a person feels fatigued to do something. By contrast, when a person does something with vitality for it, he doesn’t feel like he’s exerting himself.

### *Vitality-Giving Exertion: Learning Torah*

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Yet, we find a kind of exertion which doesn’t fatigue a person – it actually gives vitality! This is the exertion of ameilus b’Torah – exertion in learning Torah, which is life-giving.

Exertion in learning Torah is not only a tool to be successful in leaning, but to fix one’s lack of vitality. This is why “Torah and labor makes sins forgotten”<sup>60</sup> – because when combines Torah learning with his exertion, his exertion has vitality to it.

We have been discussing when a person has a problem in that he feels fatigued in his soul. Fatigue comes from a feeling of inner heaviness and a lack of vitality, a problem stemming from earth.

Vitality usually comes from the element of wind in the soul. There is also an even deeper kind of vitality that a person can have, and it comes from beyond the elements – the power of chochmah/wisdom. It is written, “Wisdom sustains its owner.” A wise person in Hebrew is “chacham”, which has the same numerical value in Hebrew as the word “chayim” – life. The Torah, which is the power of wisdom, is called the “Torah of life.”

What happens when a person loses his wisdom? He has to exert himself more. The wiser a person becomes, the less he has to exert himself. This is why sadness is associated with exertion and fatigue. The less alive a person feels, the more tired he feels – he wants to go to sleep, which is called “a sixtieth of death”.

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(By the Simchas Beis HaShoeivah, one of the Tannaim exclaimed, “Our eyes saw no sleep.”<sup>61</sup> Because their element of fire was revealed at this time, they felt alive and no need to sleep).

This we can see quite clearly. The less vitality one has, the more tired he is, and he is drawn toward sleepiness. This is why depressed people sleep a lot.

### *Sadness and Mourning*

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Besides for being the source of exertion and sleepiness, earth is also a cause for mourning.

People are sad when they mourn over the deceased. Why?

A person mourns over the fact that a soul has been removed from the world, and the world is entirely earth. A person in mourning connects himself to the one who died. What happens? Since the deceased person is no longer alive, the mourner connects with the pain of the deceased, who has been removed from the “earth” that he was on. A mourning person, in a certain way, has no vitality in himself, because he connects himself to the deceased person’s painful situation – and this is the epitome of sadness.

Worries are also rooted in Earth

(The Vilna Gaon<sup>62</sup> writes that there is another kind of sadness, and it comes from worries. He writes that the way to fix this is through having bitachon (trust in Hashem). The *sefer* Imrei Pinchas<sup>63</sup> writes similarly that the way to fix worries is by not thinking about the future.

The Vilna Gaon also writes, on a more subtle note, that sadness caused by worries are really due to exerting oneself; exertion is the curse placed upon Adam after the sin, so exertion causes sadness).

### *Sadness That Comes from Pain*

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Another usage of the word atzvus is “pain”. This we find by Chavah, who was cursed with etzev – the pains of childbirth. Why is pain considered to be a form of sadness?

The *sefarim hakedoshim*<sup>64</sup> explain that pain in the body causes sadness. A simple understanding of this is because the heaviness that a person feels in his body from the pain causes the sadness, but on a more subtle note, it is because when a person has pain, he doesn’t move. The elements of fire, water and wind are moving forces, but earth doesn’t move. Earth prevents movement and holds back the other elements from being used. All pain thus comes from an inability to use one’s abilities, which is essentially being caused by the non-moving element: earth.

The Hebrew word for pain is tzaar, which has the same letters as the word atzar, to “prevent.” This hints to the fact that being prevented from something causes pain. An increase of earth is responsible for preventing one from utilizing his abilities, so earth (when left impaired) is the root of all pain.

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<sup>61</sup> *Sukkah* 53a

<sup>62</sup> *Gra*, *Mishlei* 5: 10 and in 10: 22

<sup>63</sup> *Imrei Pinchas*, Vol. I, *Shelach*: 62

<sup>64</sup> *Koheles* Yaakov

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### Fixing Sadness That Comes from Wind-of-Earth – Through Pain Itself

However, the very fact that a person is being prevented from doing something can already be the road to repair!

Earth-of-earth is the root of an unhealthy soul. The other elements within the earth – fire-of-earth, wind-of-earth, and water-of-earth - can enable the problems in the soul to be fixed. Let us go through the options.

Pain itself can be the solution to the sadness caused by pain! Concerning one who is in pain, it is written, “And the living shall take to heart.” The possuk is showing us that if someone has pain, it shows signs of life. If he doesn’t feel pain, he resembles a dead person. If a person wouldn’t feel pain over the fact that he can’t use his abilities, it would mean that he is kind of dead, just like a dead person doesn’t feel pain. But if a person feels pain because he is being held back from doing something, he is showing signs of life, even though there is a hold of the element of earth on him.

A person cannot feel pain just from his element of earth alone (earth-of-earth), because pain involves feeling some vitality, which earth does not have. Pain comes from an increase in one’s element of wind.

Therefore, the solution to sadness that comes from pain is to combine wind with one’s earth – but only by understanding that the pain is constructive. This uses the “wind” in the pain and gives vitality to the “earth” in the pain, clearing up the sadness.

We can see this from the *Gemara*<sup>65</sup>, which states that pain over a bad dream wards off the evil of a bad dream. The suffering that a person feels over a bad dream actually fixes his own pain and sadness that comes from it.

Sadness itself is the worst thing for the soul. But it can be fixed through pain! When a person has pain, he should look at the pain as a sign of vitality, and in this way, he overcomes the dominant dryness of his earth.

This is also why the *Gemara* says that a worthy person merits to have a nightmare, because by having pain over a bad dream, it is an opportunity that can remove his own sadness. This is how “wind” can fix the sadness which comes from earth: by understanding how our pain gives us vitality.

### *Fixing Sadness That Comes from Water-of-Earth*

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A person fixes earth-related problems also through the water-of-earth. How?

People cry usually when they are sad, like when one is in mourning over the deceased. Crying results from sadness - yet, the crying itself can relieve the sadness. We see this clearly from reality – after someone cries, he calms down. How did this work? What does crying help?

It is because mourning is essentially a state in which one lacks vitality, an earth-rooted problem. But when a person cries, the water of his tears actually gives him more vitality, and that is why crying calms down a person when he’s sad.

### *Fixing Sadness That Comes from Fire-of-Earth*

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<sup>65</sup> Berachos 55a

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We can also solve sadness from fire-of-earth. How?

We explained before that the dryness of earth and the dryness of fire fuel each other, which keeps the earth dry. In this, we can find the solution to the dryness.

In *sefer* Tanya, it is brought that when a person is bitter and broken-hearted about his sins, he becomes joyous through doing such *teshuvah*. When someone does *teshuvah* from the depths of his heart, he comes to truly feel broken-hearted in the way he should, and he's sad. "Hashem is close to the broken-hearted." His sadness is what will precisely bring him to become happy, because now he is closer to Hashem. His very broken-heartedness is what brought him to the greatest happiness.

Earth by itself is dry and cannot give vitality. It can thus be the source of mourning and sadness. If a person is sad and he isn't coming to feel the true broken-heartedness, what happens? His heart becomes stony inside – a lev even (heart of stone). But if he mourns in the proper way, he comes to the true feeling of broken-heartedness he is supposed to feel. On a deeper note, this broken-hearted is actually the opposite of sadness, and it is life-giving; "And the living shall take to heart."<sup>66</sup>

There is actually nothing that can make a person happier than true broken-heartedness. The way to get to this broken-heartedness is by realizing the lowliness of one's situation, and the sadness that one feels in his heart about this; there is nothing which removes sadness and reveals happiness more than this!

Happiness takes place when the heat of the fire in the soul increases and dominates the dryness of the fire. Sadness, by contrast, is when there is a removal of heat from the fire, and the person is just left with the dryness of fire. This causes a person to descend to his element of earth, which is entirely dry. The way to fix sadness – caused by dryness of the earth – is to use the dryness as a way to reach true broken-heartedness. One will find Hashem there; "A crushed heart, G-d does not shame."

How can a person know if he's being sad in a negative way, or if his sadness is constructive? The Tanya writes that if a person feels happy afterwards, it shows that his sadness was constructive, and that he has reached the true broken-heartedness. The sadness then becomes a tool for holiness. But if a person just remains sad and his sadness doesn't amount to anything good, such sadness is evil, and he needs to fix it.

### ***Fixing Sadness that comes from Earth-of-Earth***

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We have so far explained how the other three elements contained in earth can solve sadness. Water-of-earth solves sadness when one cries, because the tears soothe the sadness. Wind-of-earth solves sadness when one has pain and comes to purify himself more through the pain. Fire-of-earth solves sadness when one is sad and broken-hearted and comes to do true *teshuvah*.

The total solution to sadness, however, lies in using the earth-of-earth.

Just like a lazy person is able to use his power of non-movement for good and come to fix his problem, so can a sad person use his very weakness as a tool to help himself. We find the following solution hinted in the possuk, "And Hashem was sad in His heart."

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<sup>66</sup> *Koheles* 7:2

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The possuk says that when Hashem brought the Flood upon mankind, He was sad in His heart. What does this mean? Sadness is a very human weakness. But how can Hashem ever be sad? It must be that Hashem's sadness is not a regular kind of sadness that we know of. It is not a bad kind of sadness, but a totally sublime kind of sadness.

The *Gemara*<sup>67</sup> states that Hashem cries over the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. This is an inner kind of sadness which a person can have, and even Hashem has this sadness.

How can this sadness be constructive? Sadness shows up on a person's face. The face of a person is also the place in a person which reveals how much vitality he has. When a person has an increase of wisdom, it can be seen on his face. The more a person reveals wisdom, the more he reveals a face – a happy face. The less wisdom a person has, the less vitality shows up on his face.

Before, we said that basic vitality is rooted in the element of wind. But there is a higher kind of vitality which comes from above the elements – it comes from one's chochmah/wisdom. The more chochmah one has, the more vitality he will have, and this will remove his sadness.

A person access chochmah with the more he reveals his soul. When a person has more chochmah, he gains more life, and he gains vitality – and he won't be sad. We know that learning Torah is forbidden on Tisha B'Av, because the words of Torah cause joy, and on Tisha B'Av we are supposed to be sad.

Thus, a joyous face on a person shows that he has wisdom, and a sad face shows that he's lacking wisdom.

From this we see a fourth way to fix sadness: by revealing more chochmah. This is not done just by revealing more wind in the soul, but through learning more the wisdom of Torah, which is the source of life. "The laws of Hashem are upright, and they gladden the heart."

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### ***Another Method Of Using Earth-of-Earth To Fix Sadness***

There is another way to fix sadness, and it also uses earth-of-earth. The spleen is the part of the body that is the source of a person's laughter, yet we also find that melancholy is rooted in the spleen. The laughter of the spleen represents the evil kind of laughter, and it is really a form of melancholy.

There is an evil kind of laughter, but there is also a way to use laughter for constructive purposes. Usually, leitzanus (scoffing) is evil, but it can be good when we make fun of idol worshippers and their ways.<sup>68</sup>

When a person is angry, it is considered as if he is worshiping an idol. The dryness of his earth and the dryness of the fire fuel each other, causing an outburst of anger. The way to fix this is through making fun of idol worship.

By turning the spleen, which is evil laughter, into holy laughter – making fun of evil – we nullify the dryness of fire, and this fixes the dryness of earth in turn.

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### ***The Deeper Solution to Sadness: Setting Limits***

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<sup>67</sup> *Chagigah 5b*

<sup>68</sup> *Megillah 25b*



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Now we will a deeper solution to sadness. Before, we brought the words of the *Gemara*<sup>69</sup> that we find the term *atzvus* when it comes to measurements – “*amah atzuvah*,” an exact measurement.

Let’s think about the four elements before we continue. Which of the elements stay within their limits, and which spread out? Fire spreads, and so does wind. Water by nature does not stay put either; we can put it in a cup and keep it together, but naturally, water does not stay where it is. Only earth stays put. This shows us that the nature to limited to where one at is rooted in earth.

Earth comes to place limitations. It can hold the other elements in place and limit them, and thus earth serves as the container. An earth wall can prevent fire from spreading, it prevents wind/air from escaping, and it prevents water from flooding. So earth serves to place limitations on the other elements.

Fixing sadness is thus to set proper limits. When Adam sinned with eating from the forbidden tree, this placed limits on his life, and now man would not live forever. This was a limitation that was detrimental to mankind. But in essence, limits are a constructive force in Creation. When a person goes beyond the proper limits and rules, this is evil, but the limit itself is a good thing. This is how sadness can be holy – when it is used to set proper limits. We need to limits in order to be able to exist. Hashem said to the world, “Enough”, when He created the world<sup>70</sup>; this shows us that we need this power of “Enough” – in other words, limits – to be able to survive.

A parent has to punish his child sometimes, and this is necessary for the growth of the child. These are good kinds of limits. We also have more prohibitions in the Torah than positive commandments – there are 365 negative commandments, while there are 248 positive commandments – to show the importance of limits.

Holy sadness is thus to have proper limitations, using our power to limit in the rightful time and place. By contrast, being extreme with our limitations causes sadness that is destructive. The first destructive limits which came to the world was the curse of death, which resulted from eating from the *eitz hada'as*.

### ***Why the Shechinah Has Pain***

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This is the depth behind earth-of-earth, and it can be used to fix sadness: setting proper limits. When Adam sinned, Hashem had to set new limits for mankind, but He was “sad in His heart” at doing so. The destruction of the Beis HaMikdash also wreaked havoc on Creation and placed new limitations on the world, but this was not the ideal situation for the world to be in.

The Sages bring that there were certain things which were taken from us ever since the destruction, and this caused certain sadness to enter Creation. This is not the regular kind of sadness we know of – it is a sadness due to the new limits that were placed on us a result of sin. This is really the pain of the Shechinah, because we have new limits, and these are not the ideal limits we were supposed to have.

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<sup>69</sup> *Eruvin 3b*

<sup>70</sup> *Chagigah 12a*

Thus, setting up clear rules and limits is the secret to fixing sadness. When a person uses this power, which comes from earth-of-earth, he is essentially connecting to the very first kind of limit – the limits which Hashem used to create the world with.<sup>71</sup>

דע אַת מיידותיך 005 עפר. עצבות. עיצוב

## 005 } *Conceptualization Vs. Visualization*

### *Every Force in Creation Is Found In The Soul*

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Let us continue to discuss the additional points about our element of earth.

We will first give a short introduction: Although we have brought the words of Rav Chaim Vital that the negative traits which result from earth are laziness and sadness (sadness is the root, while laziness is its branch), those are just the *middos* that come from our earth. Our four elements of the soul contain more than just *middos*; they contain every force in Creation. There's nothing in Creation that you can't find manifested in one of the four elements of the soul.

Since all of Creation is found in our soul, then understandably, there are endless details to the soul. Yet, although the details are endless, we will still try to understand the forces in Creation that are found in our element of earth in the soul.

We are not coming here to explain this as a kind of science. We are discussing “earth”, but we are not studying physical earth; we are studying the earth of the soul.

We will try as much as Hashem allows us to in this, and to probe into the understanding of some of the forces found in our element of earth. We will try to see how a certain matter manifests in our soul, what damages it can cause when left untreated, and then how to fix it.

Let us continue to discuss more about *atzvus*, which is what we are currently learning about – and with the help of Hashem, we will learn about the various matters that branch out from this concept.

### *Earth Makes Formations*

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As we mentioned in the previous chapter, the word *atzvus* has many meanings. It can mean simply sadness, or it can mean to become constricted. It can also mean “to form”, as we find in the possuk, “Your hands fashioned (“*atzvuni*”) and made me.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> This is known as “*tzimtzum*” – Hashem constricted some of His light to create the world. In terms of our soul, the author is saying here that we can connect to this spiritual state of *tzimtzum* by having proper limits.

*Editor's Summary of Chapters 1-4:* We have learned about the two main *middos* which come our element of earth – laziness and sadness. In this chapter, we addressed four different causes for sadness: Desires, which come from water-of-earth; haughtiness, which comes from wind-of-earth, and anger, which comes from fire-of-earth. There are five solutions for sadness: Pain (wind-of-earth), crying (water-of-earth), doing *teshuvah* (fire-of-earth), exertion in learning Torah (earth-of-earth), and setting proper limits (another use of earth-of-earth).

<sup>72</sup> *Iyov* 10:8

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Therefore, there is a connection between sadness and forming things, since both of these concepts are usages of the word “atzvus.” Sadness can therefore “form” things, as formation is a concept that branches out of sadness. Let us try to understand what this power of “formation” is and the connection that it bears to atzvus/sadness.

In the four elements, which of them is used to form things? Fire cannot form things. Although fire sometimes can have a shape to it, it’s constantly changing its form, so it has no permanent form. Wind is air, so it definitely has no form. Water naturally does not have a form; you can put it in a cup and contain it, but water by itself has no form to itself.

Only the element of earth has a form to it. Hashem used earth to create from it the mountains, hills, and valleys. So earth is the element which is used to make formations. If so, we can understand that our power to make formations comes from our element of earth. Man was fashioned from earth, and thus our entire power to make formations comes from our element of earth.

Now, if someone has a weak amount of earth in his soul, then his power to make formations will also be weak. If someone has a strong amount of earth in himself, he will have a stronger ability to “form” things.

The Arizal says that originally, all souls were contained in Adam’s soul, and then they split up into Kayin and Hevel. Hevel was a shepherd – someone who deals with animals - hinting to the animalistic aspect of a person. Kayin, however, was a farmer. He dealt more with earth, hinting to the ability in a person to fashion and forms things. Therefore, if someone’s soul is rooted in Kayin, he has more of an ability to form things, a nature of earth.

### *Forming Things Through Our Actions, Thoughts, and Fantasies*

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There are three kinds of formations we can do: in action, in thought, and through fantasizing.

The first kind of forming we find is by Kayin, the first farmer – who was able to fashion things out of the ground. This is physical formation – to simply fashion an item out of the natural materials found in the ground.

There is a spiritual kind of formation, and this is the ability in a person to be able to form things with his thoughts. This is called tzurasa d’shmaatsa (body of the discussion) by our *Chazal*; it is when a person develops a structured way to understand things.

A third kind of formation is the ability in a person to imagine things. Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote that “a person freely roams around in his imagination”, and the reason for this is because “a man is entirely made up of fantasies”, as one of our Rabbis write. Man is adam in Hebrew, which comes from the word dimayon, imagination; because since a person fantasizes a lot, there is a tendency in a person to form things through the imagination.

So these are the three ways how we can form things: 1) Physical, material formations. 2) Forming something through our thoughts. 3) Forming something through our imagination.

First let us think into what it means to “form” something, and then we can understand what these three different abilities are.

### *Before The Sin and After the Sin – How We Perceive Our Sins*

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## 50 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

There are two words in the Torah which can mean to “form”. One word is tzurah, as we find in the possuk, “And Hashem fashioned man out of the dirt of the earth.” Another word for formation is itzuv, from the words atzvus, as we find in the possuk, “You fashioned and made me.”

These are two different kinds of formations – itzuv, and tziyur. What is the difference between them?

Itzuv is to make a formation out of its original material. Tzurah is to take something from outside the material and to combine it together, reshaping it with the added material. An example of tzurah is to take a shape and carve it into the material. There is a huge difference between these two kinds of formation – and thus our soul has two totally different ways on how to form things, which we will explain.

After Adam sinned, he was cursed with, “Earth you are, and to earth you shall return.” What was the first part of the curse, “Earth you are”? If the curse to mankind was that there would now be death, then the second part of the curse, “To earth you shall return”, makes sense. But what is the first part of the curse – “Earth you are”? Adam was already earth, even before he sinned, because he was fashioned out of earth. So why he is being cursed now with “Earth you are”?

As we are about to explain, the depth of the curse was really this fact, that “earth you are”. Why are we called “earth”? True, our body was made from earth, but we have a soul as well. We are made up of body and soul; so why are we as people defined as “earth”?

The answer is: the first sin made man define himself as earth! The fact that man perceives himself as earth is all a result of the sin. Before the sin, man was not called “earth you are”, because he instead perceived himself as the G-dly spirit that resided within him. Before the sin, man was defined by the fact that he is ruach memalelah, a “social” creature. That was the soul which was breathed into him – the ability to articulate his speech, which differentiates man from an animal. After the sin, however, man is now defined as “earth you are” – in other words, because of the sin, our perception of how we view ourselves changed.

This is the depth of the difference between before the sin with after the sin. Before the sin, man would identify himself as a pure soul, and thus man was defined as a soul, a G-dly spirit. He realized that his body was just a garment on top of his true self. After the sin, man’s self-esteem got lowered, and now he views himself initially as “earth you are.” What results from all of this is that since after the sin we identify ourselves as earth, and earth has in it the power to make formations, then ever since the first sin, we have identified our power to make formations as our essence, and not merely as a garment covering over our true self.

Before the sin, a person viewed the element of earth as simply a container for his other three elements of fire, water and wind. He viewed earth as his garment, and thus he viewed his power to make formations as just a garment, not as his essence. After the sin, however, a person thinks that his power to make formations is his essence.

Now we can really understand the difference between tziyur and itzuv. The possuk uses the word “tziyur” in describing how Hashem fashioned man out of earth. This shows us that before the sin, man’s power to make formations is viewed as just a garment of himself, but not as his essence. After the sin, however, Adam was cursed with etzev/pain, which is a usage of the word itzuv. Itzuv is the ability to make formations which came about after sin – in which a person identifies his essence as “someone who can make formations.”

So when we view our ability to make formations as just a garment over ourselves – but we are aware that it’s only an ability we have, and that it does not define who we are – then such formation is called tzurah. However, if we think that we are defined by our power to make formations, then this is called itzuv – the viewpoint of after the sin.

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When a person thinks that his essence is a formation from the ground, and that his ability to make formations defines who he is – this is *itzuv*, the lower view. If we adapt the higher attitude, however, which is *tzurah*, then we realize that although we were fashioned from the earth, we are really above the earth; that there is more to us than just being able to be creative and form things.

### *The Difference Between Hashem's Creations and Human Creations*

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*Chazal* state, “Come and see how the trait of the Holy Blessed One is not like the trait of a human. A human fashions an image on a wall and he cannot breathe into it a spirit of life, insides and intestines; the Holy Blessed One is not like this, for He can fashion images within images and breathe into them a spirit of life. This is what Channah said, “There is no ‘rock’ like Hashem” – there is no “artist” like Hashem.”<sup>73</sup>

What is the depth to this, that Hashem can fashion images and breathe into them a spirit of life? Besides for the simple meaning of this, which is true, we can understand these words of *Chazal* with greater clarity, according to the concept we have explained earlier. A human being can fashion images, but the images are never made from the actual essence of the material. By contrast, Hashem took the dirt and made man from it – the essence of man’s life comes from the spirit of life which Hashem breathed into the person, while the physical material that man is made out of is not his essence, but rather a garment covering over his essence.

That is the difference. Human beings can make all kinds of things from the earth, but they are essentially creations made out of earth and nothing more. But when Hashem makes something, the material He uses to make isn’t the essence of what He is making, but rather, the spirit of life He breathes into it is the actual essence of His creation. To illustrate this concept, there was a miracle that the Aron was able to lift itself on its own; the spirit of life breathed into it from Hashem was enabling the Aron to life itself. This is an example of the perfected kind of *tzurah*, [which only Hashem can make].

When a *tzurah*/formation does not contain in it a breath of life from Hashem, it remains merely as a carving, which is *itzuv*, from the word *itzavon*, sadness. *Tzurah* also comes from the word *tzarah*, “pain” – and this hints to how *tzurah* and *itzuv* are both the same idea. The kind of *tzurah* that is “*tzarah*” – a “sad” kind of formation – reflects the meaning of “For you are earth, and to earth you shall return.”

The body of every person disintegrates in the grave (unless he is someone who became extremely holy in his lifetime). His *tzurah* vanishes, but when a person is resurrected by the future *techiyas hameisim* (revival of the dead), he attains a new *tzurah*. Why does a person’s original *tzurah* have to vanish in the first place? It is because a person’s original *tzurah* does not represent the true kind of *tzurah*, for man is fashioned out of the earth, which represents sadness. But when the original *tzurah* of man vanishes in the grave, a person sees that his *tzurah* was not his essence, and it was merely a garment – a kind of *itzuv*, a mere formation. That is exactly how the *tzurah* of man gets rectified.

*Tzaddikim* (righteous individuals), however, merited in their lifetime to realize what their true *tzurah* is, and that their physical body is just a garment over their true essence – and therefore, the body of the righteous individual does not disintegrate in the grave.

*The Power of Tziyur/Imagination*

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How does a person use the power of tzurah for holiness, and how it is used detrimentally? Here we come to a very subtle point in the soul. We will try to explain it.

There are two ways how we conceptualize something. When we are informed that someone got into an accident and his car smashed into a building, what are we thinking as we hear this story? Do we process it as intellectual information, or do we picture the story in our heads, visualizing the car as it smashes into the wall?

As children, whenever we heard a story about a Torah personality, we naturally pictured them in the stories. A child is so used to picturing things that when he is taught about Hashem, there is a tendency to try to picture Hashem, chas v'shalom. It is forbidden to try to give a picture to Hashem – as it is written, “To whom can you compare Me, to that I should be an equal with?”<sup>74</sup>; yet people have this tendency, since they are young, to try to picture Hashem.

From where does this nature come from? It comes from the nature of earth in the soul. Because earth is the source of giving picture to things, we tend to give a mental picture to everything that we hear about. We tend to visualize a concept as soon as we hear about it, immediately picturing it in our heads.

As an example of what we mean, if someone hears about a building on his street, he doesn't have to picture it, because he already recognizes it. Even if he has never actual seen the building but only in a picture, when he is told about the building, he doesn't have to picture it, because he already knows in his head about this building. But when someone is being described a building that he has never seen or hears about before, and it's the first time he is hearing about this building, how does he process the information? He will immediately imagine it. This is called “dimayon”, imagination. People are not ready to just conceptualize something unless they can visualize it in their head – this is the power of imagination.

People tend to imagine because by nature, we tend to give “tzurah” to everything we hear about. When we don't know what the accurate tzurah of something is, we imagine how it looks, but either way, we keep giving “tzurah” to everything in our heads.

This power in human beings contains a gain and a drawback. The gain of imagination is that it helps us understand something better. We can see this from the fact that we are supposed to understand a moshol (parable) and its nimshal (lesson); hearing the moshol helps us understand the nimshal that we are supposed to take out of the story (Of course, there is always a possibility that a person will get carried away with his imagination and misunderstand the moshol, which will lead him to take out the wrong nimshal). The prophets as well were able to give proper tzurah in their heads to the information being poured down upon them from Hashem. They knew how to use the power of tzurah in the proper way. This is how we see tzurah being used constructively.

But there is a drawback to using tzurah. Besides for the problem we mentioned earlier in using tzurah – which is that a person will not understand the moshol properly and thus take out the wrong lesson from it – there is another problem. Even if a person does know how to figure out the nimshal from a moshol, because he has a good imagination, the problem is that by getting used to tzurah too much, the tzurah will become “tzarah”, “pain.” We will explain what this means.

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<sup>74</sup> *Yeshayahu 4:25*

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The word tzarah comes from the word tzar, which means “narrow.” In other words, when a person is picturing something, he is apt to perceive only a narrowed perception of the concept. When a person imagines something, the imagination is essentially narrowing the information and limiting it to the bounds of the imagination. The person will then only receive a limited perception of the concept, because he has tried to understand it through imagination. Our imagination is, after all, limited to what we can imagine.

When we use imagination, we try to give something a mental kind of picture, but these images are all somehow lodged in our head from something else we have seen. We try to make the new picture somehow fit a previous picture in our heads, while in reality, it doesn't necessarily fit that picture.

Another drawback to imagination is that we are not able to imagine something which we aren't able to identify with. When we imagine things, we are always using the giant videotape that has developed in our mind throughout our entire life, and we are attempting (erroneously) to use some previous image lodged in our heads in order to be able to understand anything we come across. If our imagination isn't able to use the full version of a previous mental image, it will break up a previous image and use some parts of it to once again try to perceive new information we come across, and form a new picture, based on the old information.

Imagination is thus using our power of tziyur. Of course, our imagination certainly changes the original tzurah of a concept, but it is essentially a distortion and exaggeration of the same old information. Our imagination can exaggerate information in our heads, but it cannot really come up with anything new. It will always fall back on some previous image in the mind and use that to understand something.

Our imagination is thus limited, and it cannot imagine beyond what it can picture. It will not accept any information that it cannot picture. This is the drawback of imagination – it is a limited kind of perception, because it is always a narrow-minded kind of understanding.

### ***True Conceptualization***

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Now we can understand the depths to the words of our Sages we brought earlier, which is that Hashem fashions images and breathes life into them, while humans, by contrast, cannot.

Because we have a breath of life from Hashem that was breathed into us, we are able to transcend the lower kind of tziyur and attain a true kind of tziyur. The higher kind of tziyur which we can use is not the regular kind of mental picturing which we just addressed. What is it, and how does it differ from regular imagination?

We have mentioned earlier that there are three kinds of tzurah: to simply make a physical object; to imagine; and to intellectualize.

We are able to use tzurah even without imagination: we can intellectualize the information, without picturing it. This is the meaning of “tzurah d'shmaatsa” which we mentioned earlier. When a person is learning in the *Gemara* about an ox goring a cow, he will tend to imagine the scenario, and if he has a vivid kind of imagination, he will imagine all the details going on. He will find that his knowledge of the *Gemara's* discussion here has become clearer. In fact, many people who have a vivid kind of imagination possess a quality in that they see all the details going on, and therefore they gain greater clarity in knowing what the *Halacha* is; most people who are like this often aspire to become a poisek (Halachic authority). Vivid imagination can help a person know what's really going in what he learns in *Gemara*; that's an obvious gain.

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But that's only one side of the coin. The drawback here is that if a person uses imagination a lot in trying to understand the *Gemara*, his understanding gets limited to what he's imagining. In reality, the laws of the ox goring the cow are not limited to an ox and a cow. They apply to many more situations which do not involve an ox and a cow.

A classic example of this concept is ben sorer u'moreh (the rebellious child).<sup>75</sup> The *Gemara* devotes an entire lengthy chapter to delve into the laws of ben sorer u'moreh, yet, the Sages revealed that ben sorer u'moreh never happened, and it never will happen. If so, the Sages ask, why do we learn about ben sorer u'moreh? It is so that we should get reward for learning about it. In this, the Sages revealed to us a certain fundamental concept: Even if something isn't going to happen in the practical sense, there is still what to gain from when we just learn about it on the purely intellectual level.

Of course, the Sages also said that "Learning Torah is great, for it brings one to proper deeds"<sup>76</sup>, and this implies that we are supposed our Torah learning practical in our lives. This is true, but the Sages revealed to us through ben sorer u'moreh that we contain as well a deep power in our soul: to gain an intellectual understanding of a matter, even if it will not lead to anything practical.

We do not mean that one should not try to understand what the halacha is and not be concerned for practicality in how to act. We of course have to learn halacha, and we must know how to act in the practical sense. But it is just that we also have to learn about Torah concepts that are purely intellectual, even if there will be no gain from this learning when it comes to how we act in halacha.

To give a simple example of what we mean, when you ask a person what two plus two is, and he answers four, what is he thinking? Does he have to picture in his head two apples and then two apples, or can he just think "two plus two is four"? When we teach math to children, we use illustrations to help them, so we show them picture of two apples plus two apples. Adults can figure out the answer quickly, and without having to see an illustration.

This power can be used in an inner way: that a person is able to simply conceptualize a fact, without having to picture it.

### *Chochmah and Tevunah*

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The following concept helps us better understand the true use of tzurah. Our mind contains two abilities – chochmah (wisdom, or knowledge) and tevunah (understanding). Chochmah represents the raw material of the information, when it is undeveloped and unstructured. Tevunah, though, is when the information is built upon and developed; Tevunah is from the word binyan, to "build."

Women are blessed with extra Binah<sup>77</sup>; they possess a greater ability of tzurah, to give form to the information. We see this from the roles of of husband and wife, when they unite to have a child. The husband provides the actual droplet, which is the raw substance that has the potential to become a child. The woman's body takes the raw droplet and develops it, giving formation to the droplet – until it eventually emerges a child. This is because women represent Tevunah/binyan, the idea that represents the power of true tzurah.

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<sup>75</sup> See Tractate Sanhedrin, Chapter Eight

<sup>76</sup> Bava Kamma 17a

<sup>77</sup> Niddah 45b



*Changing Our Thought Process*

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Most people are using [the undeveloped kind of] tzurah in trying to understand Torah. As a result, the actual wisdom of the Torah is often not being accessed, and people are only giving a mental picture in their heads to try to perceive the Torah's information. The actual wisdom of the Torah, besides for affecting us practically, goes much further than the practical use of the Torah's information.

Here we come to a deep point in how we use our soul: that we need to come out of our perception based on tzurah.

Originally, before the sin of Adam (and again as we stood at Har Sinai) we were able to use tzurah as an accurate way of understanding things. This was the actual ability known as tzurasa d'shmaatsa. After the sin of Adam [and once again after the sin with the Golden Calf], our power of tzurah was damaged, and it instead became a tendency in people to give something a mental kind of imagery, which is an inaccurate understanding of the information. The true way to conceptualize something, tzurasa d'shmaatsa, has nothing to do imagining something in the physical sense. It is about intellectualizing the information, without trying to give it a physical kind of picture in our minds.

The Torah can be learned with two different kinds of perception. Matters that we learned in Torah can either be imagined vividly, or they can be learned on a purely intellectual level. The second kind is that when a person learns a sugya<sup>78</sup> of *Gemara*, he sees the tzurah of the sugya. These are two kinds of perception which our soul is capable of.

Before the sin, our thinking process was entirely chochmah/wisdom. Now that we are after the sin, "a person does not sin unless a spirit of folly enters him."<sup>79</sup> How did that original spirit of folly enter us in the first place? It was because "the eyes see, then the heart desires – and then the vessels of action complete." First Chava laid eyes on the tree, and then she desired it. This shows us how visualization of a concept makes a person think that he understands what a concept it – and that such a perception can lead to sin.

It is written, "My heart has seen much wisdom."<sup>80</sup> Before the sin of Adam, our perception was pure; we perceived things through tzurasa d'shmaatsa. We perceived things through actual conceptualization. After the sin, the "eye sees and the heart desires"; we initially seek to understand something only in the practical sense, or if we can imagine it. This kind of perception, when we remain with, leaves us at our element of earth, which represents the lowest realm – the "world of action", in which "action" becomes the focus [as opposed to intellect].

Before the sin there was no need for the 613 mitzvos, because man lived in a higher realm than "the world of action"; man lived in the plane of intellect, and everything was perceived through tzurasa d'shmaatsa. Once Adam sinned, man descended to a lower kind of existence – the realm of action, and thus now we need the 613 mitzvos, which are actions.

At the giving of the Torah, Hashem commanded us "For you shall see no image." The depth of this matter was that true perception is not attained through mental imagery, but rather through pure intellectualization of a matter, with no physical picture involved.

There are people who can only understand something if they can picture it. They need to be able to smell something, or to taste it, or to see its color. These kinds of people are very entrenched in the lowest kind of existence, the realm of action, and thus they need to be able to clothe everything with the physical. But when a

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<sup>78</sup> section of *Gemara*

<sup>79</sup> *Sotah 2a*

<sup>80</sup> *Kohel's 1:16*

person lives a more internal kind of life, he gains the intellectual perspective on things, and he will be able to understand things even if they don't have some practical application.

Of course, we do not mean to negate the fact that we must seek practicality; if one ignores practicality, he is denying the Torah, because then he isn't keeping it. But what we mean is that besides for knowing the practicality of matters, we also must develop an interest to be able to explore a matter on the purely intellectual level, even when something doesn't have a practical outcome.

The more a person leaves the lower perception coming from "the world of action" and he enters the perspective of a Torah scholar, he's building the world, because Torah scholars are called builders of the world. He is building his thoughts, even though these buildings cannot be physically seen. And when he learns *Gemara*, not only does he picture the entire scenario going on so that he can get down to the practicalities of the sugya, but he also thinks about the sugya on a purely intellectual level.

In the language of the Sages, this concept is called "remove your body from your soul." In more down-to-earth language, there are two ways in how we approach learning Torah: to seek the practical applications of what we learn about it, which involves the use of our imagination; and to learn about a matter in Torah even we were to be informed that the matter will never be relevant in the practical sense. The second kind is *tzurasa d'shamaatsa*.

One of the Sages is praised for having never seen the image of a coin.<sup>81</sup> The depth behind this matter is that the less we get used to physical imagery, the more we will be able to identify with *tzurasa d'shamaatsa*.

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### ***The Depth of Teshuvah: Returning To The State of Adam Before the Sin***

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To summarize this chapter thus far, we have differentiated between two kinds of perception: the mentality that is called *itzuv*, and the mentality that is called *tzurah*. When a person can have a purely intellectual kind of conceptualization of a matter, this is called *tzurah*. When a person focuses on *tzurah*, though – when he needs to imagine something in the physical sense, in order to identify with the concept at hand – this is called *itzuv*.

This was really the depth behind the curse placed on Adam: "Earth you are, and to earth you shall return." Man has to die, because that is the only way for him to leave his element of earth. By contrast, before the sin, there was no concept of death, because man would have been able to transcend his element of earth, for he had the true *tzurah* (image) that he had originally been created with.

We, of course, are not on the level of Adam before the sin. But we can try to draw ourselves closer, somewhat, to that pure state. When we do *teshuvah* for sins, there are two aspects to our *teshuvah*. We need to *teshuvah* for our various private sins, the "branches" of the problem. But we also need to do *teshuvah* for the root of all sins – the sin of Adam. If we attain this kind of *teshuvah*, we are able to touch the kind of spiritual light that existed before the first sin – each of us can do this, according to our own respective levels.

We have explained thus far the three kinds of *tzurah* altogether. We have explained two kinds of physical *tzurah* - seeking practicality, and the use of imagination. We have also explained spiritual *tzurah*.

#### Attaining Our True Tzurah

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<sup>81</sup> *Pesachim 104a*

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We all need to attain our tzurah; being human means that we all have a certain tzurah. Hashem fashioned man out of the earth, so we all have tzurah. Although we have explained here how tzurah affected mankind in the negative sense, that is only if we remain with our undeveloped tzurah, in which the only way to erase this tzurah is through death. If we attain the ideal kind of tzurah, we won't need death to return us to the right kind of tzurah.

How do we remove ourselves from the undeveloped kind of tzurah and attain the true tzurah? We do not want to erase and destroy our tzurah; rather, we want to develop it. How can we do it?

Since tzurah is a nature in our element of earth, we will need to find which of the other three elements can improve the earth: wind, fire and water. Wind and fire are unfeasible, since they destroy tzurah. Fire simply destroys, so it cannot be used to improve our tzurah. Wind doesn't destroy tzurah, but it breaks tzurah. So we cannot use fire or wind to improve our tzurah, because we are not trying to destroy or break our undeveloped tzurah. The only time we have to break and destroy images is by idols, in which we have a mitzvah to break them. But when it comes to the tzurah of a human, which is holy, we cannot use any methods that break or destroy.

The way to improve tzurah is through using the element of water. Water will not break through the tzurah; instead it takes the tzurah and spreads it out. Water can return the tzurah to the way it is supposed to look like.

We can see this from the following halachah. If someone steals something and he changes the physical formation of the item he stole, it's considered changed, and he does not have to return the item he stole.<sup>82</sup> But if a person steals water that was congealed and then it melts, this is not considered a change to the water, and he has to return the water he stole. Water doesn't change its form; it simply contracts or expands its own form.

The element of earth is the root of all tzurah, and earth can't expand its tzurah. Any changes that happen to earth make it into a totally new tzurah. But the element of water can take tzurah and expand it and develop it. In the element of water lies the key to giving true tzurah to the element of earth.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> But he must pay for the item he stole; see *Bava Kamma, Chapter Nine*.

<sup>83</sup> We will learn more about the element of water beginning from *Chapter 31*.

## 006 | *Limits & Beyond Our Limits*

### *The Concept of Tzimtzum/Exactness*

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Another of the natures which branch out from our element of earth is called tzimtzum, to be “exacting.” This is because another meaning for “atzvus”, the Hebrew term that is generally known as “sadness”, can also mean to be “exact”, as we find in the Sages’ term amah atzuvah, “exact measurement.”<sup>84</sup> The concept of atzvus/sadness is thus related to the concept of atzuvah and tzimtzum, which is when a person acts too exacting.

The simple understanding of this is that when a person is overly exacting in his nature, he becomes stiff, and this breeds on a cause for sadness, because he will end up contracting into himself too much. There is much to say about this point. We will try to understand more here about the nature of tzimtzum – when a person is too “exacting”, and then he becomes sad because of this.

There is an argument in the words of our Sages if it is even possible for us to ever be exact about anything.<sup>85</sup> The classic example of this is the argument in the *Gemara* if it’s possible to have twin first-borns. One of the Sages’ opinions is that two first-borns can emerge at the same time from their mother’s womb, and thus they are both considered to be first-born. The other opinion in the Sages is that one of them had to come first, since it’s not possible that they were both born at the same exact moment.

Our own soul contains the nature of tzimtzum/exactness. Let us try to understand this nature.

### *Two Kinds of Exactness: Dryness and Coldness*

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Every concept can only be completely understood when we understand its opposite. Therefore, in order to understand amah atzuvah/exact measurement, we need to also understand its opposite – amah sochakas, a “round measurement.”

The Sefer HaAruch explains that amah sochakas like a person with a laughing expression on his face, while amah atzuvah is like a person with a closed mouth. When there is a laughing expression on one’s face, there is an open space between his lips. The word for “open space” in Hebrew means revach, which can also be read “ruach” – wind. This hints to us that someone with an “amah atzuvah” – someone who has a closed expression on his face, because he is sad – is missing a “ruach” in his expression. In other words, a sad person is missing some wind in his soul.

We explained before that wind is the opposite of the element of earth. Earth is dry and cold, while wind is moist and warm. Thus, sadness, which causes a tzimtzum/contraction in the soul, is the antithesis of the element of wind.

Which of the aspects of earth is responsible for creating a tzimtzum? We find that both coldness and dryness can be a cause for a contraction. We can see this in our physical world, from the sand of a beach, which prevents the ocean water from flooding the earth. *Chazal* say that each wave of the ocean wishes to flood the entire world, but

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<sup>84</sup> *Eruvin 3a*

<sup>85</sup> *Bechoros 17a, and in other places in the Talmud.*

Hashem placed the sand on the beaches to withhold the ocean from overflowing. When the sand of the beach holds back the ocean from flooding the earth, it accomplishes two things. Firstly, it protects the earth from the ocean's waves. Secondly, it sends the ocean waves to recede. This shows us how something about the concept of tzimtzum/contraction. When there is a tzimtzum, not only enable will this make that something shouldn't spread past its limits; it also causes a rebound effect.

Both of these abilities of tzimtzum are present in the two natures of earth – dryness and coldness. The dryness of the earth doesn't let something spread (as opposed to wetness, which allows for spreading). The coldness in earth not only prevents spreading, but it also causes something to recede from it. The sands of a beach, which hold back the ocean from overflowing its boundaries, represents our power to use dryness of earth - to set limits for ourselves. It is the ability in a person to erect fences and boundaries; to set limits. The fact that the beach causes the ocean waves to recede is what represents our power to use coldness of earth; it the ability we have to “recede” [later, we will explain what this is]. These are the two abilities of tzimtzum/contraction which stem from our element of earth – our ability to set limits, and our ability to recede.

### *Overstepping A Boundary*

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Here is an example from the Torah that illustrates these two ideas of tzimtzum. There is a prohibition in the Torah for one to trespass onto another's property (hasagas gevul). This is besides for the prohibition to steal. The Sifri<sup>86</sup> asks: If the Torah already prohibited stealing, why does the Torah also have to prohibit trespassing another's property? The Sifri answers that when one bypasses another's property, he transgresses two sins: stealing, and in addition, bypassing another's property.

In other words, besides for committing two sins in this one act, he has done two things wrong. We know that when someone damages another person, he has causes a loss. When a person steals, he doesn't damage the person, but he has taken away the owner's item and brought it into his possession. A damager has caused a loss to another, but he did not bypass the other's limits. A stealer, by contrast, has minimized the other's boundaries by taking away the other's item and bringing it into his boundaries. He has caused a tzimtzum/contraction to the other person's space. The one who bypasses another's property, by expanding his own boundary, has in essence caused a recession to the original owner's boundaries.

This brings out the concept of tzimtzum which we have begun to explain. When there is tzimtzum, besides for causing a contraction, it causes a recession as well in the process [just like the beach causes the ocean to recede backwards, in addition to the fact that it keeps the ocean within its boundaries].

### *Applying This Concept To The Soul*

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The first idea contained in the concept of “tzimtzum”, which is when something is held back from spreading past its limits, is clearly stemming from the element of earth. It is caused by a lack of wind. If there would be wind present, the wind would enable spreading, as it is the nature of wind is to spread. It is only earth that limits something and doesn't allow it to spread. When we want to block something, we take earth and cement it, forming

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<sup>86</sup> Sifrei: 188

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a wall which can prevent something from getting past it. So earth is clearly the element responsible for placing limits on something.

The second aspect of tzimtzum, which is when something recedes backwards due to the fact that it can't spread any further, seems to be a direct result of the first part of the tzimtzum. When something can't spread past its limit, it recedes backward, and the tzimtzum seems to be total now. However, although it seems that way, the truth is as follows. There is a general rule in the Torah that when we have an "exclusion following an exclusion, it is really coming to include something." This is a rule that is said with regards to how the Torah's words are expounded, but it is a concept that can be applied as well to other areas. It applies to our discussion as follows. If there is a tzimtzum following another tzimtzum – in other words, when something recedes backwards because it cannot spread any further – that, itself, contains the key to how it can be fixed. We will explain what we mean.

If someone hits an obstacle in his path and he can't get past it, so he turns around, we would simply say that he is hopeless. But the truth is that now that he has turned around, he is getting himself to move. Until now, he couldn't get past the obstacle, so he couldn't move. Now he is turning around, so he is giving himself some movement. If he has movement, he is using the element of wind, which can provide him with a sense of vitality to overcome his dominant earth, which made him non-moving.

The Maharal provides an amazing parable to understand this. When you throw an arrow into a wall, the arrow can't get past the wall. But it can rebound off the wall and then it gets sent back to its owner hands.

Herein we can see that when wind/movement works together with earth/non-movement, it can cause something to recede back to the owner. When the arrow rebounds off the wall back to its owner, it is not happening due to the earthen wall alone, nor is it happening only because of the wind's movement. It is happening as a result of both factors: the wall itself, which will not budge, can actually make the arrow return to its owner. So earth and wind can work together to produce a constructive kind of movement, even when it seemed at first that no movement could be achieved here.

What we are getting at from all of this is that this shows us how we can repair an imbalance in our element of wind, which is when a person is spreading too much past his required limits.

Let us reflect on the concept of the future resurrection of the dead. When a person dies, he has lost his life spirit, which is also called ruach/wind. *Chazal* say that in the future, the "ruach" of Moshiach will come and revive the dead. In other words, when one has reached the point in which his "wind" is incapable of spreading (because his body cannot move, since it is dead), it [eventually] returns anew. Our element of ruach/wind will then achieve its complete rectification,

Now we will see how this concept applies to working with our soul. When a person is lacking the ability to spread past his limits, he is lacking wind in his soul, and this is because his earth has become dominant. If he would have more fire or water present in his soul, then he wouldn't be prevented from spreading, because both fire and water can spread. But earth by itself cannot spread; earth by its very essence stops anything from spreading. Thus, the more a person connects to his element of earth, the less he "spreads", and in this way he can prevent his "wind" from causing him to overstep any limits that the Torah places on him.

Earlier, we explained the aspect of earth's nature to prevent movement, when we discussed laziness. Now we are touching upon another aspect of earth: earth can be used a wall to prevent anything from spreading past its limits, and it can also cause something to recede backwards, as a result. This is a power in the soul that has either positive or negative uses. When a person runs into an obstacle and he turns around in the opposite direction, because he has

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given up, this is negative. But at the same time, this can be used positively, and that is because if a person recedes backwards, he is awakening some movement in himself, and in this he has the key to solving his problem of being trapped.

Once a person begins to move again – even though it appears as if he’s turning back, which doesn’t seem to be a good thing – he is still revealing in himself new movement, and he resembles how the dead will be revived in the future. How can a person remove himself from a tzimtzum that is trapping him from moving forward? He can do this by using the soul’s ability to be “cold”, an ability of water, which is the root of coldness. When something is cold, it contains vitality, because water is the source of vitality. When a person uses the coldness of his element of water, he increases his vitality, and causes himself to move again, which will enable him to get past the tzimtzum upon him.

### *The Power of Setting Limits*

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We already explained earlier that every force in Creation can be used either for good or for bad. Understanding the power of tzimtzum in our soul, which is the ability to place proper limits in ourselves, is actually the root power of how we develop our soul. If a person doesn’t make use of the power of tzimtzum in his life, he won’t be able to keep the laws of the Torah! The first thing we need before anything is the ability to have tzimtzum in our life.

We can see this illustrated clearly from the order of the events in Creation. The first thing Hashem did when He made the universe was that He made a tzimtzum. He contracted His light, made a space to contain it, and then from there, He formed all the myriad details in the universe. This shows us that the basis which we need, before anything else, is the ability to have tzimtzum.

The world needs to have proper limitations placed on it in order to survive. Without boundaries and rules on this world, all of Creation would go awry. Fire, without any limits to it, would spread and destroy the entire world. Water, without any boundaries to it, would flood the entire world. Wind, when totally unleashed without any limits, would also blow apart everything on this world and destroy it. There must be boundaries placed on our elements of fire/water/wind, or else they wreak havoc on everything. For that, we can make use of our element of earth, which can place limits on our other elements and restrain them.

So we need to acquire an ability to place limits on our abilities, or else our various abilities go overboard. Yet, we cannot go in the other extreme either – if we place too much restraint on ourselves, we will end up sapping ourselves from any vitality, and this isn’t either good. It would resemble death.

Thus, we need to define when placing limits are holy, and when they are evil. When is it good to place limits, and when is it detrimental? If the limits are helping us keep ourselves stable, then it is good. But if our limitations are taking away our vitality – whether this is total, or even if it’s only partially taking it away – then placing limits are destructive.

So if a person has lost vitality – due to a dominance of his element of earth, which has caused him to dry up inside too much – he needs to get back his vitality. The way we can do this is by using the source of vitality in the soul: the element of water. To be specific, we need to use the water’s coldness, which will spring a person back to life, like cold water being poured upon his dry soul. The cold rush of water upon him will make the person jump up and recede, which will stir him to move and take himself out of his inner confines, from his unhealthy tzimtzum.

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### Using Water To Fix Earth

When we want to fix one of our soul's elements, we need to make use of the other three. In this case, we are dealing with how to fix a problem that lies in our element of earth, specifically with regards to the problem of unhealthy tzimtzum in the soul. Let us see how we can use either fire, water or wind to solve the problem.

We already explained before how using wind can fix this problem. We also began to explain how water can be used to fix tzimtzum, but now we will elaborate. Earth is a cold substance; it gets its coldness from water, because water is the root of coldness. The coldness of water can cause a receding effect in earth. Coldness makes something recede backwards in the opposite direction. Even when wind is causing something to recede backwards, it can only do so in tandem with the coldness contained in earth, as we explained before (with the parable of the arrow rebounds off a wall), and since coldness is ultimately rooted in water, it is always water that will be the root of solving tzimtzum.

In addition to this, a limit is called *gevul* in Hebrew, which can also be read *gibbul*, a mixture. In the laws of Shabbos, we find that one is not allowed to mix water with earth and create *gibbul*. This hints to us that earth is softened when it becomes mixed with water. Before it gets mixed, it remains as a piece of earth, with no form to it. Water can come and give it some form.

When we mix water with earth, pouring too much water into the earth will make it soggy, and it won't be able to give proper formation to earth. But if we have a fine balance between the amount of earth and the amount of water being mixed together, the water can work together with the earth and give it a proper form. Hashem created Adam from earth and water together, because when there is a proper amount of water and earth together, there can be a lasting formation that is produced from the mixture.

What we see from this is that earth by itself has no form; it contains no vitality of its own. When water is mixed with earth, the earth can then get a formation, and in this way, it receives vitality from the water. By giving some formation to the earth, the earth begins to receive some vitality.

Earth cannot produce anything on its own. The only way it can grow is through water, and then its potential is utilized. When water nourishes the earth and makes it grow, not only does it make the earth grow, but it shows us that even something as limited as the earth can expand beyond its limits. This is how water fixes earth – it serves to expand the limits of earth, which cannot expand beyond its limits unless it gets water.

When a person dies, his body goes back to the earth. Yet, he can continue to live on, even though his body is in the earth. How? *Chazal* say that children are a continuation of their father's life. "Just as his children are alive, so is he considered to be alive."<sup>87</sup> As long as a person has children alive, he is not considered to be dead, because it is as if his "earth" is continuing to grow and produce. A father of his children, as well as the teacher of his students (for *Chazal* say that students are called one's children), continues to expand even after his death, through those whom he has produced.

### ***Using Fire To Fix Earth***

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How do we use fire to fix tzimtzum of earth? Simply, this is because fire can break through barriers, due to its destructive nature. So fire can be used to get by the earth. But the deeper understanding is because fire can keep

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<sup>87</sup> *Taanis 5b*



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spreading, which opposes the earth's inability to spread. Fire spreads in a different way than wind does. Wind is always moving everywhere, and thus it can be considered to always be spreading. Fire, though, simply spreads, by actually expanding in all its directions.

Fire is thus the main force of expansion, so it is the best at producing results. Fire can give birth to things; it can make more fires from itself. Earth is also known as the root force of giving birth to things, but the earth is only a tool that allows for birth; it cannot birth to more earth. Wind cannot produce more wind from itself, and neither can water make more water from itself. The root element which brings about birth is fire, and thus fire can be used to break the barriers erected by the element of earth.

We also find that the “wall of Jerusalem” is made from earth, but in the future, Jerusalem will be a wall made from fire.<sup>88</sup> What is this ‘wall of fire’ of the future? The simple understanding is that just as there can be a wall made from earth, so can Hashem make a wall from fire. But the deeper meaning of it is as follows. The original wall of Jerusalem, which was made from earth, got destroyed by fire. This hints to us that a barrier erected from earth is not the ideal kind of barrier; fire can overcome it. The real wall, the wall of fire that will be the wall of Jerusalem in the future, is the true kind of barrier, and it is preferred over a wall made from earth.

When Hashem used fire to destroy the Beis HaMikdash, which was made from earth, this hints to the misuse of the element of earth. The earth will receive its rectification in the future, when instead a wall of fire replaces the original wall of earth.

What's the difference between an earthen wall and a fiery wall? An earthen wall represents a total tzimtzum. People can't get into it, nor can they get out (unless, of course, there is some opening in the wall). But if you're in a wall of fire, you can be inside of it without being limited, because the fire spreads outward from where you are, allowing the people inside to be protected, while at the same time blocking those outside it from getting in. A wall of fire is thus not a total tzimtzum. This shows us how we can use fire to fix earth: to place a limit which will not be a total limitation. It is when a limit is only placed on our outside, while on our inside we are allowed to expand further and not be limited.

### ***Balancing Our Need For Expansion and Contraction***

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Now we will apply this to our soul. We have in ourselves an ability of tzimtzum – to place limitations on ourselves. Simultaneously, we also have the power to expand beyond our limits. These are both abilities that need to be balanced.

If a person only uses his power to place limits, and he does not ever seek to expand beyond limits, he is missing vitality. As long as a person has the ability to continue and grow, he is considered to be alive. If not, it is as if he's dead. On the other hand, if a person is always expanding beyond his limits and he does not live by the rules in life, he is breaking the necessary rules that we need to have in Creation. He resembles the Snake, who is called “the one who breaks the fences of the world”, a negative implication.

We need to be able to balance our abilities of limits and non-limits. We must live with rules, which make use of our element of earth. Yet, we must also seek to expand ourselves, which uses our element of fire.

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<sup>88</sup> *Bava Kamma 60b*

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If a person does not seek to expand beyond his limits, if he doesn't seek continuity, he won't be able to connect to the Endlessness of Hashem. Hashem is Endless and is unlimited, while we are limited creatures; how can humans, who are limited, connect to the Creator, Who is unlimited? This is the secret of our tzelem elokim (image of G-d) which Hashem created us with. Because we were all created in G-d's image, we have the power to resemble Hashem in some way, by being continuous. When we continue and expand, we can shatter limits, and in this way, we somewhat bear a resemblance to the Creator.

However, the power to shatter limits can be used for evil as well. If a person breaks necessary rules in Creation, he is being like the Snake, who wanted to break the rules. The only way for us to transcend the rules of Creations that is holy and good is through being continuous (reflected by the mitzvah to have children).

We are limited creatures; we were created from earth, which is the element that is responsible for all limitations. However, we were also created with some water, and this shows us that we can leave our "earth" from which we were fashioned from. Even more so, Hashem breathed into us a breath of life, which is our "wind" that can take us out totally from our limits. In fact, when Hashem breathed into man His breath of life, there was also some fire in it, because it was a "warm" kind of breath. Fire is therefore the most complete way to fix our earth when we have become too constricted and limited, because fire can keep producing and continuing, which counters the earth's inability to produce on its own.

Thus, the element of earth is the root of our power to place limits, and the other three elements of fire, water and wind combine together and help the earth produce limitlessly, which gives our element of earth its most complete rectification.

So on one hand, we need limits. Hashem has given us certain rules that we must follow. Simultaneously, we must also acquire the ability to go above limits, which is the root of d'veykus (to attach ourselves with Hashem).

### ***Above The Four Elements***

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In our soul, there is a higher point that is above our four elements of earth, water, wind and fire. This is the point known as *da'as*. There is a way to use *da'as* for continuity as well. It is brought in *sefarim hakedoshim* that if a person did not merit to have children, he can fulfill the mitzvah of having children, by writing Torah chiddushim (insights). Writing Torah chiddushim can give any person continuity, but it is especially true regarding someone who doesn't have children. It offers a person a way to get the mitzvah of having children, by doing something that makes him continuous. It is a way to have children – through our *da'as*. This is the meaning of how "the Torah is longer than the earth and wider than the sea" – since we can continuously expand the Torah through our chiddushim, the Torah expands endlessly. This is how we can use *da'as* to leave the limits of earth from of which we come from.

On a more subtle note, the ability to leave our limits really comes from our holy and G-dly soul, our neshamah. From our body's viewpoint, we are limited, but from our soul's viewpoint, we are unlimited. Our soul transcends the limits of earth by producing Torah chiddushim, and our body transcends its limits by having children, which gives us continuity. These are the two ways of how we can transcend our limits in a holy and positive way; any other way of trying to break our limits is evil and destructive to us.

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The *Gemara* says that a king can break fences and enter someone else's property in order to get to where he has to go, and no one may protest him.<sup>89</sup> The depth behind this is that we have an inner power in a soul called being a "king", which can break limits. (In the physical dimension, there can only be one Jewish king at a time, but in our soul, each of us has an inner "king"). The Sages also state that the Jewish nation is a princely nation, for we are all sons of the King.<sup>90</sup> In other words – we have a certain power of royalty in us, which enables us to break limits.

However, we must mention again that we are only allowed to go past our limits when we are merely being continuous [such as with the mitzvah to have children and to have Torah chiddushim]. Anything that oversteps our boundaries is misusing our power to break limits.

### *The Two Kinds of Teshuvah*

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Now that we have understood this, we can understand the following deep point. We have explained thus far how earth is dry and cold; the dryness of earth, when it becomes total, removes a person's sense of vitality, but the coldness of earth, which really gets its source from the element of water, can revitalize the dryness. So when coldness of water is used on earth, the earth begins to get fixed. The coldness of the water shakes the person up, making him recede backwards from his obstacles, and this stirs him on to have some movement. It is like the ocean waves, which recede backwards, as we explained earlier.

When a person recedes backwards in the opposite direction, he now has the power to go in an opposite direction. We began to explain earlier that moving in the opposite direction shows that the person now has the power to return to his source and start anew. Of the four elements, there are two elements which can return something to its source: fire and earth. Fire destroys something. Since the four elements are contained in everything, when fire destroys anything, it returns all the four elements back to its source. Earth returns the body back to the earth where it came from, after death.

This idea is the secret behind *teshuvah*! One way a person does *teshuvah* is by destroying his evil, and then he returns to his good source. This uses the element of fire in the soul, which "returns" something to its source by destroying it. But there is another kind of *teshuvah* as well that one can do: when he takes his evil and instead channels it in the right direction. If we have a tool that is being used for evil, we need to destroy it. But if we have an ability that was until now being used for evil, we do not have to destroy it; instead, we need to learn how to use it for good.

For example, an idol must be destroyed; we cannot repair an idol by using it for holiness. But the person who committed idol worship, who was engrossed in this idol, can now fix his search and instead channel his search in the direction of holiness. An evil object of Ein Sof zarah needs to be destroyed, but the ability in a person that was drawn towards Ein Sof zarah need not be destroyed; it just needs to be channeled in its proper direction, which is to be attached to holiness.

Another example: if a person loved to eat food, and he ate food which was not kosher, what does he need to do *teshuvah* for? The food that went into his stomach has to be cleansed out; he needs to clean out his system and destroy and trace of the non-kosher food left in him. But as for the fact that he loved the food, he need not get rid

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<sup>89</sup> *Pesachim* 110a

<sup>90</sup> *Shabbos* 67a

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of his ability to love things. Instead, he needs to channel his love for food in a direction of holiness, and he should instead love holiness.

Thus, there are two different kinds of *teshuvah*. One kind of *teshuvah* is when a person destroys the evil within him, thus returning to his good source. This is enabled by his element of fire, which destroys and then returns something back to its root. But another kind of *teshuvah* is when a person recedes from the evil direction he was going in, which gets him to begin a new kind of movement. The movement, as we said, is not evil in essence; it merely needs to be channeled in a proper direction.

### *How Teshuvah Can Remove Our Despair*

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The element of earth in us can therefore be used a source to renew ourselves with *teshuvah*. Earth in the soul, when it becomes too dominant, can bring a person to a deathlike kind of existence – when he gets too confined within himself, and he has no source of vitality going on. Then, just when the person is at the apex of his deathlike existence, it is precisely the heavy amount of earth in the soul that acts as the very catalyst that can get him to return to his source. This facilitates *teshuvah*.

“Return, o man, until [you are] crushed – until your soul feels utterly crushed.”<sup>91</sup> When a sinner truly feels crushed inside, it is then that he can be spurred on to *teshuvah*. This is the true level of *teshuvah*. It can be reached precisely when a person feels that he is at the end point of things, when he can’t go on any more like this, that he can be moved to *teshuvah*.

When a person has despair, his abilities are deadened. He feels dead inside, that “it’s all over”, so he despairs. But if he feels like he has come to the end of his capabilities, yet he does not despair from this, he has the ability to return to his source. When he feels how much his earth is limiting him and constricting him, he can get himself to move again, and he “rebounds” off the earthen wall he has run into, like the arrow that bounces off the wall and then gets sent back to its owner.

Thus, the element of earth is rectified through *teshuvah*, when it returns a person back to his source. Earth has the power to return things back to their source; just like the curse of death placed on mankind was that the body would be returned to earth where it came from – a negative use of earth’s power to return things – so can this power of earth be used constructively, to “return” a person back to his Source, when he does *teshuvah*.

The Sages recount that after Kayin killed Hevel, he wandered around the world doing *teshuvah*. Once he ran into his father, Adam, who asked him: “Whatever happened with you?” [How did Hashem judge you for killing Hevel?] Kayin answered, “I did *teshuvah*. I have been acquiesced.”<sup>92</sup> The inner kind of *teshuvah* a person can do is when he realizes that without *teshuvah*, he really has no vitality. Teshuvah provides life-giving energy to a person.

When fire is the source of a person’s *teshuvah*, he destroys his evil. But when earth is the source of one’s *teshuvah*, he returns all of his abilities to their Source, and he reveals how there is no such thing as being beyond hope.

From this we see how we can remove despair. When a person runs into an obstacle and he can’t get past it, either he can despair from this, or he can say: “Just like I was able to get here until this point, so can I go back and return to my source again.” This is the power of hope in a person, which is called *tikvah* in Hebrew. The word *tikvah*

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<sup>91</sup> *Rus Rabbah* 6:4

<sup>92</sup> *Beraishis Rabbah* 22:13

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contains in it the word kav, which means “straight line.” In a straight line, you can either move forward to one end of the line, or you can move back to the beginning of the line. In the same way that I was able to move forward and get to the point I am now, so can I use the same path to return to my original Source. [Not on the same exact path, of course, but rather, I have the power to return to my Source].

Teshuvah can reveal in a person his point of connecting to the Endlessness of Hashem (the *Ein Sof*). Without *teshuvah*, a person remains with his sins, and the sins destroy the person; “The soul who sins must die.” But Hashem said, “One can do *teshuvah* and be forgiven.”<sup>93</sup> When a person does *teshuvah*, he reaches the endless, because now he can see that it is possible to rise above anything, even when he thought he had reached his hopeless end.

Teshuvah is what truly rectifies the element of earth in a person. Mankind was cursed with a death as a result of sin, and by death, the body returns to earth. When left un-rectified, our earth symbolizes the end, the ultimate limitation placed on man – death. But Hashem has in front of Him “a book of life and a book of death.” The deep understanding behind this concept is that the “book of death” contains those who give up when they feel like they are at their end, while the “book of life” symbolizes those who know that even when it seems like they have reached their end, they can transcend the “end” and find continuity.

### *The “Baal Teshuvah” Within You*

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Thus, a baal *teshuvah* essentially reveals the deep power of the Jew’s soul to connect to the Endlessness of Hashem. He has reached the point which he really felt as the “point of no return”, in which he feels that his *teshuvah* won’t even be accepted if he tries to return; but he chooses to return anyway, revealing forth his power of mesirus nefesh (self-sacrifice). He resembles Rabbi Eliezer ben Dordaya, who had almost completely given up on doing *teshuvah*, and at the apex of his broken-heartedness, he utilized his innate power of mesirus nefesh to do *teshuvah* anyway. The baal *teshuvah* reveals how there is no situation in Creation that can really be called “the end”, because there is always hope.

The *Gemara* says that although Gehinnom will cease, the wicked do not cease<sup>94</sup>; at some point, they are rectified. If they have some more merits, they merit to become the dust under the feet of tzaddikim. What exactly does this mean, that the wicked become the dust under the feet of tzaddikim? The depth of this is that the tzaddikim reveals the power of “*teshuvah*” which lays dormant in the “earth” under their feet, and in this way, the “*teshuvah*” that the wicked can reach can show them to the Endlessness of Hashem. When the wicked become the dust under the feet of tzaddikim, this is how they receive their rectification – at first, these wicked thought they were hopeless and at their ultimate end, and now, [through being the dust underneath the tzaddikim] they can connect to the Endlessness.

In the beginning of this chapter, it was explained that there are two kinds of measurements – amah atzuvah, an “exact” measurement which has no extra space going on, and amah sochakas, a “round” measurement which allows for some space. We explained the depth behind this, that amah atzuvah needs to be rectified when we turn it into amah sochakas – in other words, when we turn atzuvah/atzvus/sadness into sochakas/sechok/laughter. In the future, we will all laugh – “Then, our mouths will be filled with laughter”<sup>95</sup> - and the depth of the future laughter is that whatever seemed to us in the current reality as “the end” was really something that could renew our spiritual growth

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<sup>93</sup> *Yalkut Shimeoni, Yechezkel 358*

<sup>94</sup> *Rosh HaShanah 17a*

<sup>95</sup> *Tebillim 126:2*

and movement. Concerning the future, it is written, “For with happiness, they go out.”<sup>96</sup> When we leave exile, we will leave all the atzvus/sadness and amah atzuvah/tzimtum/limitations behind, and instead we will enter into sechok/laughter and amah sochakas/above measured limitations. We will leave our limits, and continue to expand more and more, endlessly. Then, we will all become the ideal baal *teshuvah*, for we will be connected to the Endless Creator.

דע אט מיידותיך - מהות המידות 007 - הקושי שבעפר

### 007 | *Internal Hardening*

#### *The Earth Is Dry and Hard*

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Another nature contained in the element of earth [and soon, we will learn about the *middos* which branch out from this particular aspect of earth<sup>97</sup>] is that earth is of a hard substance. Of all the four elements, earth is the hardest, while wind is the softest.

Just as there are four elements in the soul – fire, wind, water, and earth – so are there four unique natures that can be present in each of them: warmth, coldness, moisture and dryness. Warmth is mainly manifest in fire; moisture is mainly found with wind; coldness is the main trait in water, and dryness is the main nature of earth.

Of these four natures – warmth, coldness, moisture, and dryness – it is clear that dryness is the hardest substance. Dryness is the source of the earth’s hard material. Although dryness is also present in fire, the defining nature of fire is its warmth. Earth’s defining nature is its dryness. (These are the words of the Vilna Gaon)<sup>98</sup>.

#### *The Traits of Stubbornness, Brazenness, Cruelty and Anger*

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Let’s first think into the *middos* that this nature of earth produces.

The word “hard” in Hebrew means koshi, which comes from the word “kashyusoref”, “stiff-necked.” Hashem rebuked the Jewish people by the sin of the Golden Calf that were a “stiff-necked” nation.<sup>99</sup> There is a certain negative trait in which a person becomes hardened and stiff-necked.

Another evil trait which stems from the hardening aspect in earth is called azus, brazenness. “A brazen-faced person goes to Gehinnom.”<sup>100</sup> The Maharal<sup>101</sup> explains that a brazen person is someone who is unfazed, in a situation where he is supposed to show some subservience. A person is supposed to have a certain degree of shame from another person and be concerned of another’s reaction towards him. If instead he acts indifferent toward others, he is called brazen.

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<sup>96</sup> *Yeshayahu 55:12*

<sup>97</sup> *These are referring to the middos of stubbornness, brazenness, and cruelty, which will be discussed in the next 2 chapters, b’ezras Hashem.*

<sup>98</sup> *Gra: Tikkunim: 69*

<sup>99</sup> *Shemos 32:9*

<sup>100</sup> *Avos 5:20*

<sup>101</sup> *Maharal Nesivos Olam: Nesiv HaBushah*

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To give an example, the *Gemara* says that normally a person is not brazen-faced enough to lie to his borrower and deny that he borrowed the money.<sup>102</sup> If he does deny it, though, he is called “brazen-faced”.

When a person acts brazen (for evil), he uses the hard nature of earth to harden himself inside and act indifferent to others’ feelings.

Understandably, the trait of *azus*/brazenness can be used either for good or evil, just like all the other traits. The Jewish people are praised for being stubborn when it comes to remaining steadfast to keeping the mitzvos; this is the meaning of the statement, “Yisrael is the most brazen of all the nations.”<sup>103</sup> But when someone acts brazen for an evil agenda, of him it is applied the statement of our Sages, “A brazen-faced person goes to Gehinnom.”

Right now, we will not discuss when brazenness is evil and when it can be good; we are merely analyzing the nature of this trait, which is that it comes from inner hardening, in which a person becomes indifferent. When a person is soft inside, he reacts from other people; when he is hardened inside, he is indifferent to others and he doesn’t react to those whom he is dealing with.

Another trait which stems from earth’s hardness is the trait of cruelty. Cruelty is really a branch of brazenness. A cruel person is also indifferent to others, but he goes even further than a brazen person. A brazen person is simply insensitive to another, but he doesn’t take action against the other person. A cruel person, though, will act upon his brazenness and mistreat the other.

Another trait which stems from the hard nature of earth, although it is not as obvious, is the trait of anger. Anger is fueled by the dryness of fire, as well as the heat of fire, which branches out from the dryness in the fire. Since dryness is rooted in fire, and there is dryness as well in earth, there is always a degree of hardening found in the element of fire, which is the root of the trait of anger.

To summarize, the four traits which stem from earth’s hardness are: evil stubbornness, brazenness, cruelty, and anger. First we will study what the nature of hardness in earth is, with the help of Hashem, and after that we will discuss the *middos* which come from this.

### *The Source of Hardness*

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Where does hardness come from? As we mentioned earlier, earth came from water. Water is cold and moist; when it becomes snow, its moisture is hidden, because it solidifies, and it simply remains with the coldness of the water. Snow is solid and cold, which was formed into earth. Thus, all hardening comes from water that becomes solidified. When water gets too cold, it solidifies, and it can now produce something hard. Hashem told the snow to make the earth (see *Iyov* 37:6).

So hardness comes from the removal of moisture, due to a heavy amount of cold. When moisture is removed, there is dryness which creates a hardness.

To analyze this deeper, in Egypt, there was *Ein Sof koshoh*, difficult labor. Why was it so difficult? The *Gemara* explains that men were forced to do women’s work, and women were forced to do men’s work. This made it in particular an *Ein Sof koshoh*; the difficulty was not mainly because it was so grueling, but because it was challenging

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<sup>102</sup> *Kesubos* 18a

<sup>103</sup> *Beitzah* 25b

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– men and women had to exchange roles. They were being challenged. The word *koshoh* has the same root letter as the word *koshi*; thus, *koshi*/hardness comes when there is *koshoh*/challenge.

We can learn from this that when something is a challenge to me, it is “hard”. It is a *koshi* upon me. To take this even further, when something feels too heavy upon a person to bear, he encounters a difficulty. So when something feels like a heavy weight upon me, it feels hard and difficult for me to endure.

*Chazal* say that from all of the hard substances which Hashem created, death is called the “hardest” substance of them all.<sup>104</sup> A mountain, which is hard and solid, can be cut with metal. Metal can be reduced by fire. Fire is put out by water, and water is absorbed by the clouds. Clouds are dispersed by the wind, while the physical body of man can withstand winds. The body is broken by fears that can paralyze it, and fears can be eliminated through wine. Wine’s effect is taken away by sleep. From all of these things, death is the hardest substance, because it can take away sleep.

The depth behind this matter is because at death, a person’s body returns to the earth, and since earth is the hardest substance and the root of all hardest, death is called the hardest material, because death is associated with earth.

Yet, there is something even harder than death. *Chazal* say that a bad wife is more challenging to a person than even the Angel of Death.<sup>105</sup> The Angel of Death makes even the worst illnesses seem like child’s play, for it can come and actually bring upon death to the person. But a bad wife, *Chazal* say, is even worse to a person than the Angel of Death.

A wife is called *eizer k’negdo*, the “helpmate who opposes man.” Because a wife opposes and challenges her husband, she is more difficult to the husband than any of the other difficulties he faces.

If the husband merits it, he merits a wife who helps him through the oppositions. He then discovers that she does not really oppose him, but that she is instead helping him. But even if when she is helping him, he will still feel somewhat opposed by her, because in order to help him reach perfection, she has to oppose him along the way.

Another reason given for this (by our Sages) is because a woman was created from the rib of man, which is called *tzela* in Hebrew, and *tzela* is synonymous with the word *ketzeh*, “end.” Thus, since the rib is a hard place of the body, and the rib alludes to an end, we can learn from this that a person feels that something is hard when he feels toward it as if it is his “end”.

We see this clearly when we compare the four elements. Earth is also the “last” element, while the other elements of fire, wind and water are the beginning elements. Earth symbolizes the ending of the Creation, for it was the last element in the process of Creation. The fact that it is an “end” is the root of its hardness.

To illustrate the concept (of how hardness and ends are related), a wall of the city is placed at the ends of the city for protection. It is a hard wall, and it is at the ends of the city.

We can give more examples of the concept, but the point is that when there is an end to something, this is what defines its hardness. “Ends” therefore create hardness and difficulties for a person [soon we will explain what we are referring to].

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<sup>104</sup> *Bava Basra* 10a

<sup>105</sup> *Koheles Rabbah* 7:2



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Our body and our soul were taken from two opposite ends of Creation. Our soul comes from Heaven, while our body is created from the earth. Thus, our body opposes our soul, because it was taken from the endpoint - from the perspective of our soul, which comes from Heaven, the opposite and furthest point from the earth. For this reason, we express in the “Asher Yotzar” blessing that it is a wonder that Hashem allows our body and soul to co-exist, when they are such opposites, as they were each taken from the opposite ends of Creation.

What we learn from all this is that our difficulties come from our challenges, and the depth of a challenge is that it involves two points which come from opposite ends.

Up until this point, we have explained, with the help of Hashem, the nature of hardness which is present in the element of earth.

### *Good and Evil Uses of Hardening*

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Understandably, since everything can be used for either good or evil, the hardness of earth is a power that can be used for good or evil.

On its good side, it is used as an ability to remain steadfast to your beliefs. The *Gemara* says that a Torah scholar must be “as hard as iron”,<sup>106</sup> meaning, he should be firm in his beliefs. If a Torah scholar will allow himself to be too soft-hearted, he will be swayed by the opinions of ignoramuses. The true nature of a Torah scholar is that he is unfazed by other people’s opinions, and in fact, others are in awe of him for being able to remain so firm, and thus people come to respect a Torah scholar.

This is when the power of hardness is being used for good. However, in our current discussion, we will focus on how one can fix the evil use of the power to become hardened – how we can fix evil stubbornness, as alluded to in the epithet, “A stiff-necked nation.”

To fix evil stubbornness, we will continue to use our original approach, which is that whenever there is an imbalance in one of the four elements, we need to make use of the other three elements. Right now we are discussing the problem of evil stubbornness, which is rooted in hardness of earth, so we will need to make use of the other three elements – water, wind and fire.

### *Bring Water To Stop Hardness*

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Earth is hard, but water can be poured onto it to soften it. The earth then becomes moist.

When the hardness of earth is left imbalanced, it will create all kinds of different formations. For example, in the earth, there are mountains, hills and valleys of all shapes and sizes. This is the nature of earth when it is left as it is – it changes in its sizes, and it creates all kinds of different forms (*Chazal* say that at first, the landscape of the earth was completely straight, but after Adam sinned, the earth began to become lopsided, with some places in the earth that had higher elevation and some places with lower elevation. This was how all mountains and hills came about!).

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By contrast, water stays in its original form. It does not take on another shape. Therefore, water has the power to take something hard and lopsided and give it equilibrium, straightening it out.

The Chovos HaLevovos describes this as “*midas hishtavus*” – the trait of “equalizing”. A person normally has a hard time accepting things that are hard for him to accept, but that is only if he feels opposed by things. If a person feels that he is equal with everything, that there are no “oppositions” to him, then he becomes more flexible, and he can accept things that used to oppose him. He won’t feel opposed.

An example of this concept is the principle of “*hekesb*”. One of the 13 ways in which the Torah is expounded is through the principle of “*hekesb*”. Although the word hekesb is rooted in the word koshi/hard, it is not coming to create an opposition. It is coming to show how things are equal; it is coming to show how two halachos in the Torah can be learned from each other, that they share a certain equality.

Therefore, the way to use water and to stop the hardness of earth is through using the ability of hishtavus, “equality” – to be able to deal with oppositions, to be open towards challenges and not see them as “oppositions” at all.

### *Using Wind To Stop Hardness*

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Now we will see how wind can also stop the hardness of earth. Earth is dry, and that is why it is hard. Wind is moist, which can stop the dryness, which in turn takes away the hardness in earth.

How can we actually see this? The *Gemara* says that the four winds are constantly blowing in all directions. The southern wind is the strongest kind of wind and tends to oppose the other winds, but the northern wind comes and blows together with all of them, harmonizing them.<sup>107</sup>

From all of the elements, wind serves to connect the elements together and unify them. Water represents the right side of the world, because water represents chessed/kindness, the “right hand”. Fire represents the left side of the world, because fire represents gevurah/strength, known as the “left hand.” Wind is at the middle point, so it can harmonize the fire and water together.

This is the idea behind how the “Northern Wind” comes to make peace between all the other winds. It represents the very idea of wind, which serves to bring about connection.

What we learn from this is that when there is opposition, instead of feeling opposed by it, one can instead connect with it, and then there will be no opposition.

### *Using Fire To Stop Hardness*

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How can fire stop the hardness of earth? Fire can destroy. The *Gemara* says that if a husband and wife do not merit the Shechinah between them, a fire will destroy them.<sup>108</sup> The idea behind this is that if the husband and wife are opposing each other too much, the only way they will become connected with each other is through some “fire”.

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<sup>107</sup> *Gittin 31b*

<sup>108</sup> *Sotah 17a*. (Editor’s Note: There are many explanations of this statement of our Sages. The basic understanding of this is that when there is no spirituality in a marriage, Hashem’s Presence is missing from the home, and the marriage will be doomed to fail).

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When the fire comes, it will destroy; it won't fix the opposition, but it instead takes it away by destroying it. We can also learn from here, though, that if something opposes me, I can connect it to myself if it gets destroyed.

### Fixing A 'Heart of Stone'

Now we will take these concepts and apply it to our own soul. Here, we will go above the simple understanding of our elements of water, wind and fire.

How does the hardness of earth manifest itself in our own life? The hardest part of the body is the heel. *Chazal* say that there are mitzvos which people neglect and trample under their heels. When a person neglects certain mitzvos and doesn't care to fulfill them, he has become too hardened inside. He has lost a feeling for these mitzvos; he is indifferent to them.

Earlier, we mentioned the words of the Maharal, that the trait of brazenness (*azus*) is the opposite of the trait of shame. Brazenness is one kind of evil indifference to things, but there are evil traits which are an even deeper kind of feeling indifferent to things. When a person becomes hardened inside, his heart becomes a "lev even", a heart of stone. This is a worse kind of internal hardening than the trait of brazenness.

If the hardening gets worse, it affects even the *da'as* in his mind. This is called *tokef hada'as*, "a hardened mind." This is when a person becomes very set in his evil ways, and he doesn't want to budge at all from the evil way in which he thinks.

We described this earlier as *kashyus oref*, when a person is "stiff-necked." The word *oref*, "neck", has the same Hebrew letters as the word *afar*, "earth." This alludes to how being stiff-necked [or evil stubbornness] is rooted in the element of earth.

(On a deeper note, both *kashyus oref* and *tokef hada'as* share the same root, because *da'as* is located in the neck. There are three parts to the brain/mind – Chochmah, Binah and Da'as; the Chochmah is called the right compartment of the brain, while Binah is the left compartment of the brain, and Da'as of the brain is located in the neck.)

Often, we find that a "hardened heart" is associated with being "stiff-necked." This is alluded to in the possuk, "And remove the blockage from your hearts, and do not harden your necks anymore."<sup>109</sup>

In our physical body, it's clear to us what the hardest part of the body is. *Chazal* say that it is the heels, which trample on the mitzvos, when a person is indifferent to the mitzvos. But a "heart of stone" is a deeper kind of feeling indifferent to spirituality. This is when a person doesn't want to accept truths, because he has become so set in his ways. Not only doesn't his body feel the importance of certain mitzvos, but his heart doesn't want to accept things; this is worse.

A "heart of stone" gets developed as a result of sin. When a person sins, it hardens him inside. *Chazal* say that when a person sins once, he's less scared to commit the sin a second time, and if he repeats the sin a second time, he already thinks that the sin has become permissible.<sup>110</sup> The first time a person deliberately commits a sin, he can still be inspired to repent. If he repeats the sin, he becomes indifferent towards the act. This is the "heart of stone" – when a person is indifferent even towards sins. He develops brazenness and he gets hardened inside towards spirituality.

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<sup>109</sup> *Devorim 10:16*

<sup>110</sup> *Yoma 86b*

How does a “heart of stone” become fixed? It is fixed when we “break” it apart, which is when we do *teshuvah*. We then reveal a soft heart of flesh in its place, and this is the secret behind how we fix the heart.

### ***Hardening of the Mind – For Good Or Evil***

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There is an even deeper kind of internal hardening as well, even more than a heart of stone. This is when the mind becomes hardened; when a person’s *da'as*, present in the mind, has become set in its ways. This is called *kashyus oref* in our mind [otherwise known as *tokef hada'as*].

This power is used for good, as we brought earlier, in the example of a Torah scholar who remains steadfast to the truths of the Torah, and he isn’t swayed by other opinions. Moshe Rabbeinu possessed this power in its ultimate level. When Pharaoh sent someone after him to kill him, his neck turned into stone. Simply, this was a miracle, but the deeper meaning behind this is that because he possessed the ultimate level of *da'as*, his “neck” was strong – he was so firm that nothing could oppose him.

But it used for evil when a person stubbornly refuses to accept the truth, continuing to strengthen his erroneous beliefs he has formed for himself. This is the hardness coming from the element of earth. It is when a person doesn’t want to accept upon himself the yoke of Heaven.

When the Jewish people sinned with the Golden Calf, Hashem rebuked us that we were a “stiff-necked nation.” This was because they used their hardness of the element of earth to remain set in their belief to erect the Calf; they were using the power of being hardened, for evil. Similarly, the Sages say that “Yisrael is the most brazen of the nations”, and this is referring to when the power of internal hardness is being used for evil.

But on the other hand, a Torah scholar is supposed to be firm in his mind and be “as tough as iron” when it comes to remaining steadfast to the values of the Torah. This hardness is not coming from his element of earth, but from a higher place in the soul - his *da'as*.<sup>111</sup>

### ***Developing Our Da'as***

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How indeed can we attain a firm kind of *da'as*, which will enable us to remain steadfast to the truth, and not be swayed by evil?

First, we must understand the following. *Da'as* is the highest point in our soul. In *Da'as*, everything is found; as the Sages state, if we have it, we have everything, and if we don’t have it, we have nothing.<sup>112</sup> By contrast, the element of earth is the lowest point in our soul.

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<sup>111</sup> Editor’s Note: Throughout the author’s *sefarim*, the Rav mentions that there are two kinds of *daas* – the *daas* of the heart, and the *daas* of the mind. (For more about this, see the book “Getting To Know Your Feelings”, Chapter 16). The *daas* of the mind is to use our intellectual abilities to contemplate and reflect about matters of holiness, and the *daas* of the heart is the second stage, in which we become aware, in an emotional way, of that knowledge – after we internalize the mind’s knowledge. Here, in this chapter, the “*daas*” is referring to *daas* of the mind.

<sup>112</sup> *Nedarim* 41a

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Thus, *da'as* and the element of earth (in other words, our physical body) are at two opposite ends of the spectrum. As we brought before, “ends” create difficulty. Because we are made up of two opposite ends, we encounter a challenge.

However, in spite of this fact, *da'as* also contains another power which can counter this great challenge we are faced with. [We will explain].

There are three abilities contained in our *da'as* – the power to separate information (*da'as hamavdeles*), the power to decide upon information (*da'as hamachraas*), and the power to unify information and connect to it (*da'as hamechaberes*).

When a person unifies with differences, he utilizes the highest part of his *da'as* – the ability to connect, which is called *da'as hamechaberes*. When Adam married Chavah, the possuk says that now he “knew” her; because when one connects with another, that is how he really gets to know the other person. This utilizes the power of *da'as*, and when *da'as*/connection is utilized between husband and wife, it reveals oneness between them. “And they shall become one flesh.”

*Chazal* say that one should be “soft like a reed”, and the example of this is brought from Dovid HaMelech, who would feel like a small worm as he learned Torah, and he was in a gentle mode. But when the very same Dovid HaMelech had to go to war, he made himself as tough as a cedar wood tree.<sup>113</sup>

Therefore, our ability of *da'as* is able to take our abilities of inner softness and inner hardness and combine them together, harmonizing them into one.

So we can use our *da'as* to realize that when we feel opposed, there is no other choice we have other than to follow Hashem’s will, because there is really only “one” – Hashem. If we realize that there is only One reality in front of us – Hashem – then it will be very clear to us, even when we are faced with challenges to our values, Whom we should choose. We will realize that there are really no oppositions at all to us, because there is only One choice to make.

In this way, a person is able to be both soft and hard at once. He can be “soft like a reed”, as the Sages say,<sup>114</sup> but he can also be firm and tough when he has to. We contain in ourselves a paradox, and we can live with the paradox when we use our power of *da'as*, the power to harmonize different abilities in ourselves.

### *In Summary*

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To summarize, we mentioned four ways to fix internal hardening: through using water, wind, fire, or *da'as*. The solution of *da'as* is the deepest solution to internal hardening, because it harmonizes the different aspects going on in us; it can help us be soft when we have to - and tough when we have to.

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<sup>113</sup> *Taanis 20a*

<sup>114</sup> *Taanis 20a*

## 008 | *Brazenness*

### *The Concept of Brazenness*

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In the previous chapter, we mentioned that there are four traits which stem from the hard nature of the earth: stubbornness (*kashyus oref*), brazenness (*azus*), cruelty (*achzariyus*), and anger (*ka'as*).

In this chapter, with Hashem's help, we will learn about the concept of brazenness/*azus*. We will see how it can be used either for good or evil.

The Sages state that one should be as "brazen as leopard" to do Hashem's will.<sup>115</sup> This is the positive kind of being brazen, in which a person boldly and bravely perseveres in serving the Creator. In the very same statement, the Sages end off with: "A brazen-faced person goes to Gehinnom." This is referring to a person who uses brazenness for evil.

We must understand the essence of brazenness – what makes it good, and when it becomes evil.

The simple and superficial understanding is that a person is brazen for evil, it's the same kind of brazenness as when he acts good, and he is just using it for evil purposes; according to this understanding, "Be brazen as a leopard" refers to using your brazenness for good, while using this very same brazenness for evil is what makes a person go to Gehinnom, for being brazen-faced.

But the deeper understanding is that they are two totally different kinds of brazenness. When a person acts brazen for good, it's a whole different concept than when someone acts brazen for evil – and the same is true vice-versa.

We will try to understand this a little, with the help of Hashem.

### *Four Manifestations of Brazenness*

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Where do we find brazenness manifest? We will start by showing how it is in our body, and then we will progress to see how it shows up in our soul.

We have already mentioned one place in which brazenness comes up in: the Sages called a brazen person by the title of *az panim*, "brazen-faced." Brazenness shows up on a person's face, when he acts brazen.

But if we get more specific, brazenness is located in the forehead. We confess to Hashem in *Viduy* for the sin of having *azus metzach*, "brazenness of our forehead." In addition, the *Gemara* says that the *tzitz*, the band of the turban of the Kohen Gadol – which is placed on the forehead - atoned for the sin of brazenness.<sup>116</sup> We also find

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<sup>115</sup> *Avos* 5:20

<sup>116</sup> *Zevachim* 88b

that Tefillin, which are placed on top of the forehead, are called oz, “splendor,”<sup>117</sup> which is related to the word azus/brazenness, because Tefillin also atones for brazenness. So brazenness is associated with the forehead.

We also find brazenness associated with the left hand. The word oz, which means “might”, is related to the word azus/brazenness, and the possuk states that Hashem His arm to act mightily with.<sup>118</sup> We know that the “right hand” of Hashem is used for kindness, while the “left hand” is used for might and justice.

Finally, there is a fourth place of the body which is associated with brazenness – the nose. It is written, “Who knows the might of Your wrath?” ; the Hebrew word for “wrath” is af, which can also mean “nose”, and the word for “might” is oz, which is related to the word azus/brazenness. So brazenness bears a connection with the nose.

These are the four general parts of the body in which brazenness is connected with: the face, the forehead, the left arm, and the nose.

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### ***The Difference Between Brazenness of The ‘Face’ and ‘Forehead’***

The first two kinds of brazenness we mentioned are brazenness of the face and brazenness of the forehead. What is really the difference between them?

The Maharal<sup>119</sup> explains that brazenness is mainly manifest in the forehead (*azus metzach*), and this is when a person’s brazenness lays dormant within him; he is not attacking anyone yet with his brazenness. But when a person turns his brazenness on others, it becomes *azus panim*, to be “brazen-faced.” The word *panim*, “face”, also can mean to be “poneh”, to “turn”; when a person turns his brazenness on another person in the form of aggressiveness toward him, it becomes the trait of cruelty (*achzariyus*).<sup>120</sup>

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### ***Brazenness of The Face: A Form of Internal Hardness***

What is brazenness of the face, *azus panim*? How does it develop?

We explained earlier that brazenness stems from the nature of hardness in the element of earth. Just like internal hardening can produce the trait of evil stubbornness, which is called *kashyus oref* – to be “stiff-necked” - so can it be a source for producing *azus/brazenness*. Brazenness of the face is called *azus hapanim* – it is when a person turns his face from another, indifferent to another person, and instead of showing face to another, the person shows him his neck instead – his *oref*. We will explain what this means.

When a person doesn’t want to show interest in something, he turns his face away. He turns his neck on the person instead. This is *kashyus oref*, “stiff-necked” – when a person, instead of showing face to another, turns his neck on him instead and hides his face from the other.

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<sup>117</sup> *Berachos 6a*

<sup>118</sup> *Yeshayahu 62:8*

<sup>119</sup> *Nesivos Olam: Nesiv HaBushah*

<sup>120</sup> See *Rashi to Pirkei Avos 5:20*.

But when a person has *azus panim*, he goes even further than this: he shows the other person his face, but he gives the person a hardened look on his face. Although he faces the person, it's like his face isn't there, because instead of showing him a soft expression, he basically gives him his "neck" instead. It's as if his neck is on his face.

So *kashyus oref* is when a person is indifferent to another and therefore turns his face away from another, showing him his neck instead. But *azus panim* is when a person gives his face to another, but he gives the person a hardened expression on his face, and it's as if he's showing the other his neck rather than his face [although he is facing him physically].

With *kashyus oref*, a person acts hardened towards another person, when he could have dealt with him softly. With *azus panim*, a person uses a deeper and more negative kind of indifference towards the other: he takes his face, which normally gives a soft expression, and he hardens it instead.

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### ***The Root of Brazenness: Lack of Feeling Inferior To Others***

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Now we can understand with sharper clarity what the definition of brazenness is.

When a person turns to another and faces him, either one of three things are going on here. Either he is turning to the other because he identifies the other as being equal to himself; or he looks at another person as being beneath him; or he is looking at the other person as being someone of greater authority than he.

If a person is looking at another person as if the other person is beneath him, he will most definitely harden himself towards that person, and he will exercise strength and authority towards the person whom he deems lower than himself.

This is actually a power that can be used for good, and it is used by a teacher, who must teach his student with a command of authority.<sup>121</sup>

Of course, a teacher must perfect his character and act softly with his students, and he must show a pleasant countenance to them, even though he is of higher authority than them. But the nature of a teacher is to see the students as lower to himself, and thus he will naturally be overly strict towards them, if he does not try to perfect his character.

There is also a person who looks up to others and sees them as above himself, and he feels nullified to them. If he looks at another person as being above him, he will act softly toward him. This is the root of the trait of bashfulness. When a person realizes that there are certain people who are authority over him, he realizes his low self-worth next to them, and he acquires the positive trait of bashfulness.

But when a person acts brazen towards someone higher than himself – either because he doesn't realize that he is lower than the other person, or even if he considers the other to be equal to him, when in reality the other person is on a higher level than him – such a person is the kind of person of whom the Sages say, "A brazen-faced person will go to Gehinnom."

When a person has the negative trait of brazenness, he is in essence being prevented from accepting upon himself the yoke of Heaven. The Sages equate the trait of bashfulness with fear of Heaven,<sup>122</sup> so if someone is missing

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<sup>121</sup> The Sages state, "Cast bitterness upon the students" – *Kesubos 103b*.



bashfulness, he is missing fear of Heaven. Brazenness is thus when a person doesn't want to nullify himself to someone who is on a higher level than himself.

### *Chutzpah/Impudence and Azus/Brazenness*

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The Sages say that chutzpah (impudence) towards Heaven might get a person somewhere, but at the same time, chutzpah is like acknowledging the king without acknowledging that he wears a crown.<sup>123</sup> *Chutzpah* is the same concept as azus/brazenness.

What exactly does it mean that chutzpah towards Heaven can be effective for a person?

We are on this earth, while Heaven is above us. When a person realizes that Heaven is above him and thus he nullifies himself to that dimension that is beyond his grasp, he has what is called yirah/awe. That is why yirah is known as Yiras Shomayim, “fear of Heaven”, because he recognizes that Heaven is above him and thus he comes to nullify himself. If a person doesn't have this awe towards Heaven and he instead views himself as being equal with Heaven, he has azus panim. Of him, the Sages state that if he acts with chutzpah towards Heaven, he can still get somewhere.<sup>124</sup>

But, the Sages say that even though he might get results from his chutzpah, he is only acknowledging that Hashem is King, but he doesn't acknowledge the “crown” of the King. In other words, a brazen person doesn't know how to see others as higher than him; he doesn't acknowledge authority. Either he thinks he's the authority, or at best, he will acknowledge another as his equal, but never does he see anyone else as his authority that he must acknowledge.

The Sages said that if a Jew walks without a head covering, he is very brazen.<sup>125</sup> Why? The answer lies in a different statement of the Sages. The Sages state that wearing a head covering increases fear of Heaven.<sup>126</sup> The depth behind this is that in order for a person to have fear of Heaven, he must recognize what is above him – he must have authority in his life that he submits himself to. Of course, there are many levels to how much a person can fear Heaven, but in general, fear of Heaven is accessed as long as a person recognizes that is a Higher Authority over himself. A brazen person therefore might recognize that there is a King, but he doesn't want to acknowledge that the King wears a crown as well. That is the depth behind why he won't wear a head covering – he doesn't want anything to be on top of him.

This is the depth behind brazenness.

### *A Woman's Natural Bashfulness Towards Her Husband*

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<sup>122</sup> *Nedarim 20a*

<sup>123</sup> *Sanhedrin 105a*

<sup>124</sup> *The Sages say this regarding Moshe Rabbeinu, Eliyahu HaNavi and Channah HaNeviah, who all prayed to Hashem and spoke impudently to Hashem out of a great desire that their prayers be answered.*

<sup>125</sup> *Kallah Rabbasi: 2*

<sup>126</sup> *Shabbos 156a*

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The Sages state that generally, a woman does not act brazen towards her husband [with regards to lying to him]. The depth of this is because ever since the sin of Adam, woman was cursed with, “And he [man] will rule over you.” A husband is above his wife when it comes to authority, and this is the natural way of the world.<sup>127</sup> For this reason, a wife is naturally bashful with her husband, and she will generally not be so brazen as to lie outright to him.

The *Gemara* says that during marital relations, the husband should be on top of her body, and the wife should lie underneath him; if they switch around their roles, the Sages say that the union will result in impudent children.<sup>128</sup> The depth of this is that had they done the act properly, with him on top and her on bottom, her natural bashfulness would remain. But when the husband is on bottom and she’s on top, this is brazenness for the woman’s part, because he is supposed to be “above” her; thus their union will result in brazen children.

We can bring many more statements of our Sages about brazenness, but the point of all the examples we brought was to show what the definition of brazenness is: whenever there is a lack of recognizing authority.

### ***Brazenness: Not Interested In Being Connecting With Others***

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We mentioned earlier that the element of earth is always on bottom of the other three elements; fire, water, and wind are always above earth. This aspect of earth, that it is always on bottom, alludes to the trait of humility, in which a person sees himself as being below others, allowing others to be above him, in the same way that people walk over the earth and trample it. As we ask Hashem in the end of Shemoneh Esrei - “Let my soul be like the dust to all.”

However, this aspect of earth can always be used in a person for evil, and that is when a person does not want to accept that he is at a lower level than others. When a person doesn’t want to accept that others are above his level, he hardens himself, and he uses the internal hardening in his element of earth [which was the concept described in the previous chapter].

When our Sages describe a person who acts with brazenness, it is usually with regards to a person who is acting disrespectful to another person, when that other person is someone of important status. When a person does not honor those who are to be more honored, this defines him as being brazen.

*Chazal* say that in the era preceding Moshiach, chutzpah/impudence will increase<sup>129</sup> – the trait of evil brazenness will be revealed to its full depth. What is the nature of this brazenness? *Chazal* say that children will disrespect and shame their elders; sons will disgust their fathers, daughters will revolt against their mothers, and daughters-in-law will also rebel against their mothers-in-law. This is the brazenness in the time before Moshiach’s arrival – people cannot accept that there are others who are authority over them.

This shows us the depth of brazenness. Brazenness stems from the element of earth; how can it be that earth, which has a tendency towards lowliness, is the source of brazenness, in which a person does not feel lowly about himself towards others at all? If anything, an increase of earth in the soul should make a person feel lowlier about himself; how does it make him become more brazen?

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<sup>127</sup> *Nedarim 20b*

<sup>128</sup> *ibid*

<sup>129</sup> *Sotah 49a*

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It is due to the hard nature of the earth. Earth can make a person develop internal hardening in his soul, and then the person is hardened; this makes him unable to accept other's authority over him, and thus he acts brazen.

### *The Depth of Brazenness: Lowering Others*

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There is a more subtle understanding, though, as follows. Earth can be the source of humility in a person - when he feels lowly about himself, in a healthy way; such a person is using his element of earth for holiness. But if a person uses his element of earth towards others – he feels that others are lower than him, and thus he won't respect even one person. That's brazenness – when a person has no concept of respect for others, and even more so, he belittles others, because others are lowered in his eyes.

If a person uses his sense of lowliness towards himself, he uses earth for a holy purpose. “And let my soul should be like the dust to all.” Avraham Avinu said on himself, “I am like dust and ash.” He was humble; he did not feel himself as being more important than others. This is also known as the quality of bittul, that a person can “nullify” his sense of self-worth, feeling completely nullified, “like the dust of the earth,” as we say when we nullify the chometz on Erev Pesach. This is not low self-esteem – which is a base emotion in the lowest level of our soul - but rather a true sense of humility which our soul can reach.

But if a person turns his “earth” on someone else – when he considers others to be lowly and worthless in his eyes – he uses earth for evil. To illustrate, if a person throws dirt on someone, this is the prime example of having no importance for another. Throwing dirt on someone is basically saying that the person is worthless. This is when a person uses earth for evil, and if a person has this negative trait, he won't be able to subjugate himself to even one person in the world.

A person only subjugates himself to something that is above him. If the person perceives something as being above him, he will honor it. When a person recognizes that the Shechinah is above him, that his teacher is above him, that his parents are above him, and that older people are above him, he will honor all of these, whom he recognizes as being above himself. He uses his element of earth for holiness, nullifying himself and feeling lower than those who are higher than him.

But when a person takes his lowliness of earth and combines it with internal hardening of earth, he becomes brazen, and he belittles the honor of others. This defines brazenness.

If a person would only harden himself inside, but he wouldn't belittle the honor of others, then he's not totally brazen toward others, because at least he is honoring others. On the other hand, if he only belittles others, why doesn't he belittle himself also while he's at it? Only when he hardens himself inside, in addition to belittling the honor of others, will he become totally brazen.

### *Fixing Brazenness: Showing A Smile To Others*

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The ultimate level of evil brazenness is when a person doesn't “show his face” to anyone – he doesn't want a connection with others, because instead he nullifies everyone in his eyes. His whole relationship towards others is that he sees others as dirt in his eyes. Instead of making himself be “like the dust to all”, he feels that everyone else is

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like the dust. He has hardened himself inside, so he can't nullify himself to others; other people to him are lowly and undeserving of honor. With his attitude, he does not wish to connect with any person on the world.

When a person gives someone a pleasant look on his face and he smiles at him, he shows the other person that he is aware of his existence. By smiling at another person, you acknowledge his existence, that he's worth something. By contrast, if a person nullifies the existence of other people in his eyes, he doesn't show his face to them.

Smiling at another person with a pleasant countenance (which is called *he'aras panim*) is a trait which can either come from fire, wind or water. But earth can never be a source of *he'aras panim*. This is because the element of earth is the root of having low self-worth for others, and therefore earth cannot help a person produce a radiant countenance towards someone else.

This is the evil that is behind brazenness. When a person is brazen towards others, he does not show his face to others; he does not smile at others. A brazen person is called *az panim*, "brazen-faced", because he gives no face to others. He turns his face on other and instead other people see his neck. How do we rectify the trait of brazenness? A brazen person needs to show another person his face, a face of radiance and holiness.

Whenever we want to fix one of the elements, we need to make use of the other three elements. Since brazenness is stemming from a lack of showing face to another, and it is rooted in the element of earth, we need to make use of the other three elements – water, wind and fire – and use those three elements to reveal a "face" to another person.

### *Using Water To Fix Brazenness*

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How can we use the element of water to reveal a "face" to another? It is written, "Just as water reflects a face to another, so does a heart reflect one to another."<sup>130</sup> Water reflects back our face when we look into it; nothing reflects better than water, because water is clear. Even though water is still and unmoving, it can still reveal a face.

Of course, if we look into the water with an angry grimace on our face, it will reflect back to us our angry expression. If we smile into the water, it shows us back a smile. But the point is that water reflects back a face to us, so water can help us reveal a "face" to another. If water is dirty from any earth that it's in it, it can't cause a reflection, but naturally, water is clear, and it can cause a reflection when we look into it.

Hashem created Adam out of earth, and then mixed water into him to form him. Thus, water and earth can work together to create a form. This shows us that when water combines with earth, it can give form to the earth. (There were *tzaddikim* who knew this secret very well and they were able to create a *golem* from earth and water, and if he was extra meritorious, he was able to use wind and have a spirit of life breathed into the *golem*). The point we see from this is that water can give form to earth, thus revealing a "face" in earth.

On a deeper note, the reason why earth does not have a face is being face is called *panim* in Hebrew, which can also mean *pnim*, the "inside". Earth has no inside. When we turn over a piece of earth, we do not see its inside (unless we dig into the earth). With the other three elements, we can see into their inside. When water is clear, we can see all the way all the way until its bottom. We can see clearly into wind, which is air, as long as the air isn't dusty. Fire is naturally clear and we can see through it, as long as it's not burning something, where it then becomes a murky smoke.

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<sup>130</sup> *Mishlei* 27:19

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But we cannot see into the inside of earth. The inside of the earth is always covered from the human eye.

However, we can see the inside of earth when we dig into it. When we dig into earth, we can fashion a container out of the earth, and then earth can get an 'inside' to it for us to see. This is unlike the other elements. When we see into the inside of water, we see the water itself, and the same goes for wind and fire. But when we dig up the inside of earth, we turn the earth into a container.

From this we can see how we earth can work together with other three elements. When we use earth as a container, earth gets an inside – it gets a *pnim*, which can also be read “*panim*”, “face”. In other words, when we use earth as a container for the other three elements, then our earth can help us gain a face to show others, which can rectify the trait of brazenness.

As we mentioned earlier, earth is the containing element of the other three elements. It is not an element unto itself, because it is useless by itself. It can only gain importance when it contains the other three elements, whereupon it helps the other three elements activate their potential. This is also because earth is the lowest of the four elements, and therefore, it really serves to lower itself to other three elements and let them go on top of it, where it acts as a container to hold them.

How do we fix the “lowly” nature of earth [which is the source of brazenness, since a person lowers other people in his eyes]? If we give an inside to the earth, we turn it into a container for the other three elements, and then it enables the other elements to be active. Really, the earth has no inside, but if we use it as a container for the other three elements, it gains an 'inside', because now it contains the other three elements. In this way, the earth's lack of *pnim/panim* is fixed, and we give an inside – a face - to earth. Now it can connect with the other elements of fire, wind and water.

Now that we have seen this point, we can return to discussing how we can use water to fix earth. It is precisely the aspect of lowliness in the nature of earth which aids in its rectification. Earth has no inside of its own – it only serves to contain the other elements. When we use it to contain the other elements, it becomes a container which will either hold the inside of water, fire or wind. With regards to water – our current point – we give earth an inside, a *pnim*, when we pour water into it. We can see this from our physical world clearly. When we pour water into earth, the water burrows into the earth and creates a formation out of the earth, enabling the earth to become a container and hold the water.

What we see from this is that earth receives its rectification when it makes itself into a container for something else other than itself. With regards to itself, it has no importance, but with regards to something else, it gains importance, because it is a container for other things.

[In other words – when a person nullifies his inflated sense of self-importance and instead makes others important, he rectifies the trait of brazenness].

This is how one rectifies brazenness through using the element of water.

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### *Using Wind To Fix Brazenness*

How do we fix brazenness using the element of wind? It is similar to how we use water to fix brazenness. The root of the problem behind brazenness is because the person removes his face from someone else and instead shows

him his neck. The way we fix this is through revealing our face to the other. Thus, a person with brazenness fixes himself by somehow reconnecting to the other person. Wind can also be used to reconnect with others, as follows.

Earth is the source of disparity, for it is dry and cold. Wind, by contrast, is hot and moist. Heat and moisture are both properties that foster connection.

Man is called ruach memalelah, a “talking spirit.”<sup>131</sup> Speech is thus identified with wind. When we speak with others, we can connect with others; thus, “wind” is what connects us with others.

In addition, the trait of bashfulness is the opposite trait of brazenness; “A brazen-faced person goes to Gehinnom, while a shameful-faced person goes to Gan Eden.” Bashfulness is rooted in the element of wind; this is apparent from the fact that its opposite trait, brazenness, is rooted in earth. If brazenness is rooted in earth, then it follows that its opposite, bashfulness, is rooted in the opposite element of earth: wind.

When a person is bashful to others, he humbles himself to others. This is a trait that comes from our wind. We don’t ever find fire or water getting “humbled”. Someone who is humble is called shefal ruach, “humble of spirit”, which hints to how he is using his wind to humble himself more to others.

This is not to be confused with shiflus/lowliness, which is a trait that is rooted in the element of earth. Lowering oneself to others is shiflus [which can be used for good or evil],<sup>132</sup> and this is rooted in the element of earth. Bashfulness does not mean that one lowers himself to others, but rather it is a different way for one to humble himself. When a person is bashful, he rectifies his brazenness, through using the element of wind.

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### ***Using Fire To Fix Brazenness***

It is obvious how we use fire to rectify brazenness. When a person is brazen, he has removed the pleasant expression from his face from others. Fire is bright and thus illuminates; when a person shows a shining countenance on his face toward others, this is called he’aras panim. The trait of he’aras panim is what rectifies one’s azus panim.

When a person is brazen, he doesn’t show a pleasant expression on his face toward others. In essence, he has removed the “light” of his face, his he’aras panim, and in its place he instead shows azus panim toward others, by turning his face away from others. A person rectifies this by going in the opposite direction: by showing he’aras panim toward others. This is how we use fire to rectify brazenness – by using the “light” of he’aras panim towards others; our “light” is rooted in our fire.

Until now we have explained how one can rectify azus panim, the trait of being brazen-faced, through using the elements of water, wind and fire.

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### ***Rectifying ‘Brazenness of the Forehead’***

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<sup>131</sup> Targum Onkelos to Beraishis 2:17

<sup>132</sup> This will be explained (b’ezer Hashem) in Chapter 19.

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Earlier, we discussed another kind of brazenness: *azus metzach*, “brazenness of the forehead.” What is the depth of *azus metzach*? The Maharal explains that *azus metzach* is the essence of brazenness, while *azus panim* is the result of *azus metzach*; it is when the *azus* gets turned on others.

Before, when we discussed the concept “internal hardening”, we explained the trait of *kashyus oref*, being “stiff-necked” [in other words, evil stubbornness]. We explained that this develops from two factors: dryness of earth, and from a hardening of one’s *da’as*. This is a hardening that takes place to one’s *da’as*, which is present in the area of the *oref* – the neck.

When the *da’as* of one’s neck becomes hardened (and he dries up inside), this develops the trait of *kashyus oref*, to be stiff-necked. But there is also *da’as* present on one’s face, and it is in the forehead; when this *da’as* becomes hardened, it develops the trait of *azus/brazenness*. It is known as *azus metzach*.

To be a bit clearer, the trait of *azus panim* develops from *kashyus oref*, which is stemming from one’s element of earth. The trait of *azus metzach*, however, is coming from a hardened *da’as* [from the *da’as* that is present in the forehead, and not from the *da’as* that is in the neck].

The Sages say that the Jewish people received the Torah precisely because we are brazen.<sup>133</sup> This is being said in a good context of us; it is referring to the holy kind of *azus/brazenness* that we possess. What is the depth to our holy brazenness? It is connected to the fact that the generation of the desert was known as the “generation of knowledge” (*dor de’ah*). In addition, we received the Torah through Moshe Rabbeinu, who is the epitome of the concept of *da’as*. This is the depth of our holy brazenness – we are brazen, in a holy way, because of our power of *da’as*. That is what enabled us to receive the Torah.

By contrast, the Sages that the epitome of a brazen animal is a dog. “And the dogs are brazen of spirit.” The main enemy of the Jewish people, Amalek, is also identified as a “dog.” The brazenness of dogs, represented by Amalek, is the exact opposite of the holy brazenness of the Jewish people, which is *da’as*. Thus, Amalek is the force in evil that opposes our holy power of *da’as*.

The difference between holy brazenness and unholy brazenness is really contained in the Maharal’s words which we quoted before. The Maharal says that unholy brazenness comes from the body, and this is the kind of brazenness which develops from our element of earth; while holy brazenness comes from our soul, our *da’as* – this is called *azus metzach*.

So *azus panim* is when one’s brazenness is coming from his neck, from his body – from his element of earth. When one reveals the holy essence of his brazenness, *azus metzach* – the “forehead”, which is also where one’s true *ratzon* (will) is contained in – he reveals the holy kind of brazenness. Of course, if one uses his *ratzon* for evil, this is the unholy use of *azus metzach*. But when one reveals his true will – how “It is our will to do Your will” – he utilizes brazenness for holiness. Of him, it applies the praise of the Jewish people, “The most brazen of the nations is Yisrael.”

*Azus/brazenness* is used for evil, though, in the following scenario. The *Gemara* says that if a woman openly asks her husband for marital relations, the children of such a union will be “brazen children.” But if she is modest in her request and she instead convinces him into marital relations, without verbalizing her request, then they will merit good children.

What is the difference between the two ways? It is because being verbal in a request is a sign of brazenness.

It is written, “A destitute one speaks in supplications, while a wealthy one speaks brazenly.” When a person is brazen, he verbally expresses his brazenness. The Sages state, “Da'as is hidden in the lips” – what a person says with his mouth reveals what’s going on in his *da'as*. If a person is brazen with his mouth, it shows that he has an impaired *da'as*.

But when one’s brazenness is coming from a holy source, it is stemming from his inner *ratzon* to do Hashem’s will. Such a person, when he needs to make a request (such as a wife who wants marital relations) does not express it verbally, but rather, he is gentle about it. The “brazenness” here is holy, because it is not coming from an impaired *da'as*, but rather from his inner, true *ratzon* [to do Hashem’s will].

Thus, *azus metzach* might be used either for good or evil. When it is used for evil, it becomes evil brazenness, and it is expressed in an aggressive manner, manifesting itself in impudent speech. But if it is being used gently yet firmly, then the brazenness is coming from one’s true *ratzon*, and it is the holy way to use *azus metzach*.

### ***The Depth of Evil Brazenness: When Connection Is Impossible***

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Now we will go deeper into the depth behind brazenness – when it is evil, and when it is good.

The Sages give two prime examples of a “brazen-faced person.” One opinion in the Sages is that it is referring to a child born out of a forbidden union, in which the woman was a *niddah* (ritually impure) at the time of the union. The other opinion is that it is referring to a child who is a *mamzer*, a child born out of wedlock.<sup>134</sup>

A *mamzer* represents a more complete kind of brazen union than a child born from a *niddah*. A Jew is forbidden to have marital relations with his wife when she is a *niddah*, but it’s only a temporary disconnection. She is not, in essence, someone who he may not connect with; it is just that she is temporarily forbidden to him, until she becomes ritually purified again. But a *mamzer* is someone who a Jew cannot marry at all. In other words, a *mamzer* is someone who we cannot connect with, and this is the depth behind brazenness – someone who cannot have connections with other people.

If one has marital relations with a *niddah*, he has been brazen in that he has connected with someone whom he was not allowed to have that connection with, for the time being. But when one has relations with a married woman, he has done something much worse – he has attempted to connect with someone whom he is in essence disconnected from. The child born from wedlock, a *mamzer*, is thus the result of brazenness on its most ultimate evil level.

We can see a hint to this from the words *niddah* and *mamzer*. The word *niddah* comes from the words Hebrew words “na” and “nad” together, which means “moving and wandering.” This hints to the fact that when a woman becomes a *niddah*, she is distanced from her husband, but only temporarily. She has “wandered” away from him, but eventually, she comes back, when she is ritually pure again. But the word *mamzer* comes from the word *zar*, “stranger.” This is because a *mamzer* was born from someone whom one was never allowed to connect with – a married woman is a complete stranger, in essence, to the man who had relations with her.

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<sup>134</sup> A *mamzer* is a child born of the union from a Jewish woman who is already married to another Jewish man. His status is that he cannot marry into the Jewish people (except for a woman who has the same status that he does).



Thus, brazenness is when one is a “stranger” to another person, and that is why he acts brazen to the person.

### *When Brazenness Is Holy*

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*Chazal* say that one should be “brazen like a leopard.” Why is the leopard the epitome of brazenness? The answer lies in the following. Elsewhere, *Chazal* say that a leopard comes from the union between a forest hog and a jaguar. This is reminiscent of a mamzer, because one kind of animal has connected with an animal that is a complete stranger to itself. A mamzer represents the evil kind of brazenness. When this brazenness is used for good, however, of this *Chazal* say, “Be brazen like a leopard.”

There is another way how we can see that a mamzer is worse than a child produced from niddah. A mamzer may not marry into the Jewish people; he is considered a complete stranger, because he has come from an evil, “strange” relationship. But the child born from a niddah may marry into the Jewish people; it is just that his lineage is somewhat damaged.

A mamzer thus represents an attempt to achieve a union when it is really impossible for the connection to ever happen. Since all evil has its equal use when it comes to good, we can find this concept when it comes to good as well. *Chazal* say that one should be “brazen as a leopard”, meaning that when can strive to form a connection with something even when it seems impossible, if it is for something holy. When a person is brazen in a holy way, when he is “brazen like a leopard”, he is unlimited in how much he can connect with something that doesn’t seem to allow for a connection.

The Hebrew word for “leopard” is “namer”, which has the same numerical value in Hebrew as the word “eretz”. The word eretz comes from the words ratz (run) and aleph (chief), which alluded to how a person must “run” to the Aleph/Chief of the world: Hashem.

Every person has the ability to be brazen, but usually we are limited in how brazen we are when it comes to pursuing a holy goal. When we run into an obstacle in our path of spiritual progress, we often lose our ambitions, and we get lethargic. On this, *Chazal* say, “Be brazen as a leopard.” That even when you have obstacles in your path and it seems impossible, you can transcend the obstacle. That is the depth of holy brazenness – you can brazenly persist to achieve your goals for spirituality and holiness, even though it seems impossible sometimes.

The power of holy brazenness, *azus d’kedushah*, comes from our power of holy *da’as*. Through utilizing our holy *da’as*, we can connect to anything and achieve the seemingly insurmountable.

Through using holy brazenness, we have the tool to receive the understanding of the holy Torah. The Torah is the source of everything, and it can connect all of Creation together. In order to be eligible for the Torah, which connects everything, we ourselves have to acquire the ability to persevere in our spiritual goals and be able to connect to anything. As *Chazal* say: “The most brazen of the nations is Yisrael”!

## 009 | Cruelty

### *Cruelty: When Internal Hardening Causes One To Get Aggressive*

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Cruelty (in Hebrew, achzariyus), is another trait which stems from the element of earth. It is a branch of the trait of azus/brazenness. It is also another result of internal hardening [discussed in the previous two chapters], a nature of earth.

In the previous chapter, we mentioned that azus/stubbornness is when a person acts indifferent to another person; he acts to another person as if he's a stranger. When this negative trait is taken further, it becomes the trait of cruelty.

The word for "cruel" in Hebrew is achzar, which is a combination of the Hebrew words ach (brother) and zar (strange); in other words, when a person is cruel to another Jew, he acts to his brother Jew as if he's a stranger to him, rather than seeing another Jew as a brother to be friendly towards.

When a person has the trait of azus/brazenness, he hasn't yet actualized his negativity towards others. It is only dormant within him. A brazen person will lie to someone outright, but he doesn't do any form of cruel action to another. The brazen person, who is hardened inside, might eventually become a cruel person as well, though, if the internal hardening festers and increases.

Cruelty is rooted in the element of earth, which is cold and dry. It is therefore an internal hardening that has become total. But on the other hand, cruelty is also related to the element of fire, which is hot and dry; the dryness of fire can cause an increase of hardness in a person, and in this way, it is actually the heat of the fire which is spurring him on to act. Thus, the act of cruelty is also coming from a spark of fire in the soul.

For this reason, Shlomo HaMelech puts the traits of anger and cruelty in the same context.<sup>135</sup> This is because fire, the root of anger, can also spark cruelty. However, although some fire is involved here, the trait of cruelty mainly gets its strength from the element of earth.

### *Cruelty: Feeling Towards Another Like A Stranger*

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*Chazal* say that before the Creation of our current world, there were really 974 generations which were ready to come into existence already, but Hashem decided not to create them in the end. Instead, He took them and dispersed them throughout time, and these are the brazen-faced people that exist in every generation.<sup>136</sup>

The "brazen-faced people" in every generation are really people who have no connection to our generation. Since they do not really connect with other people, they act cruel. They do not have a concept of becoming close to others. The reason why these souls act cruel to others is because they are like strangers of our current generation.

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<sup>135</sup> *Mishlei 27:4*

<sup>136</sup> *Chagigah 13b*

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They only know members of their own generation, which was before our current world was created. Therefore, these souls look at everyone in the world like strangers to them, so they act cruel to them.

In the end of the day, these souls were placed in the generation, but they have no connection to the generation. This is the root of their cruel behavior to others.

Thus, cruelty comes from viewing someone else as a stranger, and this is manifest when a person does not wish to have a connection with another person. The element of earth is the source of disconnection; warmth, which is in fire, enables connection, and moisture, which is present in both wind and water, can also foster connection. But dryness and coldness are both natures which oppose the idea of connection, and since both dryness and coldness are present in earth, earth is therefore the root of disconnection.

We can learn what cruelty is by examining what its opposite is – the trait of compassion. (When we want to understand a concept, we can learn from its opposite, as the Maharal<sup>137</sup> says that we can conceptualize what redemption will be like, when we compare it to what exile is like).

The opposite of cruelty is compassion. Since cruelty is rooted in earth, it must be that compassion is rooted in wind, because wind is the exact opposite of earth. Earth is dry and cold, and it cannot bring about connection. Wind, however, contains moisture and heat, which can each bring about connection.

In cruelty, we can find three kinds. The coldness of earth can be the source of one kind of cruelty, while the dryness of earth is responsible for another kind of cruelty. If the coldness and dryness of the earth combine, we get a third kind of cruelty.

We will try to understand the different forms of cruelty there are – cruelty that comes from coldness, cruelty that comes from dryness, and cruelty that comes from a combination of both.

### *The Three Cruel Animals of the World*

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*Chazal* mention three kinds of animals which are particularly cruel: the raven, the mountain goat, and the snake.

A raven is cruel towards its children. The Metzudas David writes that Hashem Himself feeds the babies of a raven, who are not fed by its mother.<sup>138</sup> A raven does not even feed its small children.

A mountain goat is also cruel to its children. The *Gemara* says that as soon as the mountain goat is about to give birth, it goes to the edge of the cliff, so that its newborn will fall down the cliff and die. Hashem makes a miracle and sends an eagle to save the baby goat, which quickly swoops down at the precise moment – not a second too soon, and not a second too late.<sup>139</sup>

Another cruel animal is the snake. “The head of the “pesanim” (serpents) is cruel.”<sup>140</sup> A pesen is a species of snake; after it gives birth, it throws its babies away to others. It does not take pity on them.

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<sup>137</sup> *Netzach Yisrael*

<sup>138</sup> *Tehillim 147:9*

<sup>139</sup> *Bava Basra 16a*

<sup>140</sup> *Devarim 32:33*

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It is clear to any person that if there are three kinds of animals who act very cruel, it must be that there are three unique kinds of cruelty which can exist. We will try to understand each of these.

### Cruelty of the Raven

How is a raven cruel? The *Gemara* says that a raven is black; when its child is young, the child has not developed its black color yet, and it is white. The parents hate it, because it does not look like them. [Therefore they don't feed it, so Hashem Himself has to come feed it]. But when the young raven begins to get older, it gains a black skin color, and then the raven parents begin to love their child, because now it looks like them.<sup>141</sup>

This shows us what the nature of cruelty is. A raven does not feed its children, because it views its child as a stranger, for not looking like it. On a more subtle note, it can't stand its child for being the opposite skin color itself, so it hates the child for being its opposite.

It is not only ravens that act like this. There is a kind of person who will meet someone from another country and act like a stranger towards him, solely because he's "not his type."

The raven acts like a stranger towards its own children, which is worse, of course. Why does it act cruel to them? Because the child is not "its type" – the parents have a black color, while the child has a white color. As soon as the child becomes black-skinned, the parents stop being cruel, because now it looks like them, so now they view the child as "their type."

Such cruelty comes when a person can't stand someone else who is his opposite. It is a cruelty rooted in the coldness of earth. When there is coldness, there will be opposition. The nation of Amalek was the first to attack the Jewish people. They are compared to a person who goes into a hot bath and cools it off, enabling others to come and follow suit.<sup>142</sup> Amalek is "cold" to the Jewish people precisely because they are the opposite of the Jewish people. They are the nemesis of the Jewish people; Amalek is called the "first" of the nations, and so are the Jewish people called the "first" – we are the "first" holy nation, while they are the "first" evil.

Coldness is the source of disparity between people. When people are "cold" toward each other, they are separate from each other. By contrast, heat can enable two people to connect, even two people are fighting with each other.

For example, a wife is called *eizer k'negdo*, the helpmate who opposes her husband. If the husband continues to love her in spite of the fact that she fights with him and opposes him, his love will overpower their differences. The "heat" between the husband and wife can act as a catalyst to unify them together, even if they are amidst differences, because that is the nature of heat: it brings about connection.

We have so far seen the first kind of cruelty – the cruelty of the raven. Understandably, the cruelty of the raven can manifest in our own soul as well, and *Chazal* used the raven as an example from the animal world to bring out the concept of cruelty. From a raven, we can learn that a person acts cruel to another when another is "not his type", when another is the opposite of his personality. When a person sees another as his opposite, this causes a lack of connection with the other person, and this is rooted in the cold nature of earth.

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### *Cruelty of the Mountain Goat*

<sup>141</sup> *Kesubos 49b*

<sup>142</sup> *Rashi to Devorim 25:18*

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The second example of a cruel animal that *Chazal* speak about is a mountain goat. When it is about to give birth, it goes to a cliff, so that its baby will fall off the cliff as soon as it is born and die.

What is the meaning behind this kind of cruelty? How can a person – or even an animal – be so cruel to its own children, allowing them to die as soon as they are born? The truth is that if someone does not have children yet, *Chazal* say that he is the kind of person who might act cruel to a child.<sup>143</sup> But if someone already has children, how can he be so cruel to his own children?

The way we can understand this is based on the following. *Chazal* say that a childless person is considered to be dead.<sup>144</sup> The depth behind this is because a dead person has dried up and disintegrated into the earth; dryness symbolizes a lack of life, just as a dead person has no life and thus dries up into the ground. Thus, a person who is childless is considered to be dead, because his feelings towards children have dried up.

Now we can understand how a mountain goat can be so cruel as to try to kill its own child; we will explain.

A person, by nature, does not want to die. In addition, a person naturally wants to have children. A mountain goat does not want children, and thus it seeks to kill them; since it wants to kill its own child, the mother mountain goat itself is considered to be dead. It doesn't value life, because its feelings for children have dried up. The mother mountain goat has developed an internal dryness within herself, and thus it is cruel to its child.

(Similar to what we are saying, Rashi says that the word *achzar*, “cruel”, is another term for Gehinnom, because it is a dry place in which there is no life going on.<sup>145</sup>)

The cruelty of the mountain goat is a whole different kind of cruelty than a raven's cruelty. A raven is cruel to its children because it doesn't like them. When its young children get older, it will begin to like the children. But a mountain goat is even crueler to its child: it wants to actually get rid of the child - it does so because it lacks its own value for life, because it has dried up inside itself.

If an animal has a value for life, it won't be able to kill its own child. If a person has a value for his own life, he won't be able to disregard the life of another person. But when a person doesn't feel alive inside himself – when he dries up inside himself – he can come to kill another person. He can kill someone, because he's not even aware of what he's doing; he doesn't realize that killing someone means that his life is being taken away. A killer has no value for life; he has dried up inside himself, and therefore, he is kind of dead inside himself.

A raven does not kill its child; it withholds food from them. It is certainly acting cruel to its child, but it is not trying to take away the life of its child. It is rather lacking a connection with its child. It understands that its child is alive, and it still has a value for life. A mountain goat has a worse kind of cruelty to its child. It will actually try to kill its child, because it has no value for life.

To illustrate, we can find an example that explains this concept from what goes on in our own world. There are people who practice abortion (*rachmana litzlon*). If you would ask such people, “Would you ever kill a newborn baby?” they would respond, “G-d forbid!! I would never do such a thing!” But they don't see a problem in killing a fetus inside its mother. Why not? Why do they think that killing a fetus is not the same thing as killing a live baby? It is because from their perspective, which is erroneous, a fetus is not considered to be alive yet. Therefore, they have

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<sup>143</sup> *Horiyos* 1:4

<sup>144</sup> *Nedarim* 64b

<sup>145</sup> *Mishlei* 5:9

no problem in killing a fetus. If a person would consider the fetus to be like a living baby, he wouldn't be able to do abortion.

Here is another example. A person might see a hundred ants walking and then step on all of them, and he does not feel bad at all that he just killed a hundred ants. He doesn't consider them to be living creatures – and that is why he can kill them. If you would ask such a person, “Why don't you take a knife and kill a horse with it?” he will probably not agree to do such a thing, and even if he would, he would do so with a guilty conscience. In reality, there is no difference between killing a horse and killing an ant; they are both creatures with a life in them. The only difference between them is from the viewpoint of human emotions, and in this case, the emotions are erroneous. It comes from a lack of recognition for living things.

This kind of person won't kill a horse, but not because he has more compassion on a horse than on an ant. It is rather because he has no value for life. A person might view a small ant as a creature that has no life in it, and that is why he won't feel bad killing an ant.

We have brought these two examples to help us understand the kind of cruelty which the mountain goat has towards its children. It will kill its own children because it has no value for life; a lack of value for life comes when an inner dryness takes place in the soul, which is coming from the element of earth.

### *Cruelty of the Snake*

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The third kind of animal which *Chazal* say is cruel is the snake. A snake acts both cold and dry towards its children, which is the most total form of cruelty. It takes the cruelty of the raven (coldness) and the cruelty of the mountain goat (dryness) and combines them both together in its act of cruelty.

We can see this clearly and simply from the Snake, who wanted Adam to eat from the forbidden tree, so that Adam would die from it. *Chazal* say that the Snake wanted to get Adam killed so that it could marry Chavah. Here we see the very first act of cruelty that took place in Creation – the Snake, whose act of cruelty is the source of all cruelty.

The Snake wanted Adam to die, so that Adam would go back to the earth he was created from, back to the coldness and dryness of earth. Thus, there was both coldness and dryness present in its cruel motives.

In our own soul as well, if dryness and coldness combine, it can develop the trait of cruelty in a person. The kind of cruelty that results from both dryness and coldness together is the total kind of cruelty, and it is defined as a disregard for continuation. We will explain what this means.

Death is the end of life. Life, in concept, is something that represents continuity, something that continues to go on unless it is stopped. Death comes and puts a stop to life, ending it. Cruelty is a concept in which a person brings an end upon something, because the person does not see the continuity of the person he is being cruel towards.

We can compare this to the following scenario. If a person tells someone to go kill another person, he will naturally refuse to do so. But if a person tells another to go “pull the plug” on a dying person on the deathbed, there are many people who unfortunately would do it. Of course, we who keep the holy Torah know that such a thing is forbidden, and we also know that our basic emotions in us should recoil in disgust from such a request, but amongst those who do not keep the Torah, there are unfortunately many people who feel that not only there is nothing

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wrong with “pulling the plug”, but that you’re even being kind to the ill person in doing so; that it’s okay to end his life so you can “put him out of his misery.” They do not consider it to be cruel at all!

The depth behind their rationalization is because they view the dying person as someone whose life has essentially ended, and therefore, they feel that they are not taking away his life at all. To the contrary, they think they are being kind to him in ending his life. That is their misguided thinking – *rachmana litzlon* (May G-d have mercy on us from such a thing).

This is a kind of cruelty in which a person is cruel, yet he thinks he is being kind! A person will act this way if he fails to see the continuity of the person in front of him. When a person does not see the continuity of another person, he views another person as someone whose life has basically ended, and therefore he justifies his cruelty.

Earlier, we discussed the cruelty of the mountain goat. This is a concept of cruelty in which a person has no value for life. Yet, the mountain goat is still aware that its child exists; its problem is that it does not value the existence of its child, in spite of its awareness. This is a kind of cruelty which stems from internal dryness – when a person lacks a value for his own life, because he has “dried up” inside, and thus he lacks the value of life in another.

But the snake’s cruelty goes further than the mountain goat. It understands that its young are alive (and this is due to its coldness, which provides somewhat of a value for life, since coldness offers a degree of vitality), but it lets its children die, because it does not see them as continuous. The snake thinks [for some reason] that its child’s life is considered to have ended already, and therefore, it does not think it is doing anything wrong with letting its child die.

We can see this as well from the Snake. The Snake told Adam that he will die anyway, regardless of he eats from the tree or not. In reality, Adam would only be cursed with death if he eats from the tree, but the Snake told him that he will die regardless. The depth behind this was because the Snake viewed Adam’s life as having already ended, because the nature of its cruelty doesn’t allow it to see continuity.

In addition, we can also see how the Snake is rationalizing its cruelty, thinking instead that it is performing a kindness to Adam and Chavah by tempting them with its argument. It told them that if they would eat from the tree, they would become like Hashem, and know everything. It was convincing them that it’s for their own benefit to eat from the tree. Simply speaking, this was because the snake is a clever and devious creature, and therefore it had raised a very tempting argument. But the deeper understanding of this is that because it did not see the continuity of mankind, it viewed Adam and Chavah as being already dead anyway, and therefore it thought it was doing them a service by trying to convince them [on how to get eternal life].

To summarize thus far, there are three kinds of cruelty. One kind of cruelty is that a person does not want to connect with others, when others are not to his liking. This is cruelty of the raven. A worse kind of cruelty is when a person has no value for another’s life at all, and this is cruelty of the mountain goat. The ultimate form of cruelty is when a person is aware that another person lives, yet he feels that the other’s life is a lost cause anyway, and therefore he justifies his cruelty. This is cruelty of the snake. This is the depth behind cruelty.

### ***Fixing The Cruelty of the Raven***

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We will now see how we can fix the three different kinds of cruelty, depending on the factors in the element of earth which are causing the source of the cruelty.

Cruelty of the raven, as we mentioned, is coming from the coldness of earth. It needs to be fixed by using coldness of water. Since the coldness of earth here has become evil, we need to use a good kind of coldness to counter it. The good kind of coldness is found in the element of water.

On the second day of Creation, Hashem separated the upper waters and the lower waters. At first, the waters were all mixed together, but the different waters were not happy being together with each other, and they fought. So Hashem split them apart from each other, creating a divide between the upper waters and the lower waters. Did this further their strife? No; to the contrary, it made the lower waters yearn to return to the way things were in the beginning. Ever since the waters were split, the lower waters have been yearning to returning to the upper waters, where they will be closer to Heaven.<sup>146</sup>

We can learn from this that when there is a separation between people, one of the ways how this can be repaired is through uncovering a yearning to return to our original state of unity.

This is how cruelty of the raven can be fixed – when we use the “coldness” of the water, which yearns to unite now that it has been separated from its other half.

### *Fixing Cruelty of the Mountain Goat*

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Now we will discuss how we repair the second kind of cruelty we mentioned, cruelty of the mountain goat. Since this kind of cruelty is stemming from the dryness of earth, the way to fix it is through its opposing power – moisture, which is rooted in the element of wind.

We can see from what happens by the mountain goat. Hashem makes a miracle and sends an eagle to rescue the baby as it falls down the cliff. Why does Hashem send an eagle? The simple understanding is because the eagle is considered to be the embodiment of compassion.

But the deeper meaning is because an eagle represents wind, for it can soar very high, similar to how drafts of wind ascend upward very fast. An eagle represents wind, and wind is the root of the trait of compassion. The moisture of wind is the opposite of the dry earth; if earth’s dryness produces cruelty, than this in turn means that its opposite, the moisture of wind, is the source for compassion.

Thus, since dryness of earth is the root of cruelty, it can be fixed through its opposite – the moisture of wind, which we utilize if we reveal compassion towards another.

To give an example of what this is, the Vilna Gaon wrote that if a father really wants to love his child and have compassion on him, he should keep a certain distance from his child sometimes. Distance from the child will make the father miss his child more, which will increase his yearning and love for his child.

Of course, distance is not always a good thing. If it is coming from the dryness of earth, then acting distant toward a child is a form of cruelty, and it simply causes a person to disregard another’s life. But if it is coming from the wind in the soul, then distance can actually foster more connection.

Wind can either bring about connection or separation; winds can connect things together by blowing them together, or they can separate things by blowing them apart. Still, if we want to achieve connection with another

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<sup>146</sup> *Tikkunei HaZohar 5; see also Midrash Aseres HaDibros: 1*



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person, we should use wind, rather than use earth. Earth separates things [due to its coldness and dryness], and it cannot bring about connection. Wind, though, can bring about connection even after it separates things.

We can compare this to demolishing a house. Sometimes a house is demolished simply so we can get rid of it, but sometimes we knock down a house so we can build a better one its place. This is how we can understand wind: although wind can cause separation, even when it causes a separation, it can do so in order to bring about a connection.

Thus, when dryness of earth becomes dominant in the soul, there are two possibilities of what will now happen. Either it will cause a person to dry up inside himself and have no value for life, whereupon he is considered to be like a dead person inside himself. Or, it can dry him up and spur him on to become thirsty – the dryness can inspire him to yearn and quench his thirst. This yearning is rooted in the element of wind, and thus if a person uses wind, he can counter his inner dryness and instead yearn for vitality.

We can see this idea expressed by a person who becomes very despondent about life. One kind of person, when he becomes despondent, might become so down about himself that he totally gives up from life. Another kind of person, however, when he becomes very despondent, will be spurred on to inspire himself, and he will yearn to go free from his despondency, more than ever before.

The classic example of this was Rabbi Elazar ben Dordaya, who fell so low in sin that he had totally given up on ever doing *teshuvah*.<sup>147</sup> But when he reached the climax of his despondency, he cried so much and became more inspired, more than ever before, and he “moved” himself<sup>148</sup> so high that he reached straight access into the Next World.

Thus, dryness of earth can serve as a catalyst to help a person become inspired. We can compare this to a thirsty person who is searching for a water fountain, and he feels like he is going to dehydrate unless he drinks within the next few minutes. If he is told that there is a ten-minute walk to the nearest water fountain, he will run there as fast as he can. What we can see from this is that as long as a person believes that there is hope to his situation, the very fact that he is dry inside is what spurs him on to change his situation and demand vitality for himself.

To give another example of how this is true, if a person is compassionate, and he sees another person who is in great need of help, his compassion will burst forth from him and rise to an even higher level than it normally is. The more “dry” the other person is, the more he will increase his compassion to help him, and thus, a strong amount of dryness can actually be a catalyst to reveal compassion [from another].

This is how cruelty stemming from dryness of earth can be fixed. It is when his internal dryness spurs him on to become compassionate.

*Chazal* say that it is forbidden to act merciful towards the cruel.<sup>149</sup> The depth behind this is because having mercy on a cruel person doesn't move the cruel person to change and become merciful. If the cruel person would stop being cruel at least a little after we are nice to him, then it would be fine to have compassion on him. But, the nature of the cruel person is that he does not gain a value for others' life, even if we have compassion on him. Thus, it is forbidden to have mercy on him, because a cruel person remains cruel.

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<sup>147</sup> *Avodah Zarah* 17a

<sup>148</sup> *Editor's Note: It seems that the Rov is alluding to the element of wind, which is defined by its “moving” nature, that Rabbi Eliezer ben Dordaya used his element of wind to counter the negative dryness of his element of earth.*

<sup>149</sup> *Koheles Rabbah* 7:16

A cruel person has no hope for valuing life, because he has dried up too much inside himself. He is like the mountain goat. He is in a situation of total despair. But wind can come and blow around dirt, giving new life into the earth – it can provide hope to the earth that it can come out of its dryness. This is how we fix cruelty stemming from dryness of earth – when the cruel person reveals wind/compassion.

### *Using Fire To Repair Cruelty*

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We can also use fire to help repair cruelty. Fire is hot and dry; the dryness of fire can also be the source of cruelty, as Shlomo *HaMelech* equates anger with cruelty; since anger stems from fire, and anger is related to cruelty, it must be that part of the cruelty is getting its dryness from fire.

However, herein we can find a solution to cruelty – from the very source of the problem itself. When anger is coming from cruelty, the anger can actually be a catalyst that helps remove the cruelty! How?

Fire, besides for being a source of dryness, also contains heat. The heat in fire can cause fire to burst out, and thus it can make a person's cruelty burst forth. As the cruelty is exploding outward from the person, it gains a degree of vitality from the heat of the fire, and thus, the cruel person can now some feel life going on inside himself. Now that he has gotten angry, he just might be able to get rid of his cruelty.

Of course, when a person explodes in anger, this is the negative trait of anger. But if a person does have an angry outburst, it can still send him some vitality.

To illustrate, if a father has a rebellious son, and he gives up on improving the son, he won't even get angry at his son anymore when the son rebels. He stops getting angry at his son, not because he has overcome his anger, but because he has given up on the son. He has no hope anymore that his son will improve. But if he still has some hope left for his son to improve, his son's misbehavior will cause him to get angry, and the anger shows that the relationship between them has not yet lost is life.

We see from this that anger shows how there is some life going on; when there is no anger going on, it shows that there is no life here going on.

So if a cruel person gets angry at his victim, he just might have some hope now in abandoning his cruelty. Until now he was dried up inside himself, and thus he comes to act cruel to others, but now that he has had an angry outbursts towards his victim, he gains some vitality in himself [albeit negative], due to the warmth of the fire in his anger. The anger gives some "warmth" to the situation here, and even though it is a negative kind of warmth, it is still warmth, and the warmth shows that some of the cruelty has been lessened.

Now that we understand this, we can now understand that cruelty is not defined by an act of cruelty, but rather, it is an attitude a person has in which he cannot find vitality in a situation. [He is either being like the mountain goat, or he is acting like the snake, as we said before]. Therefore, when a cruel person has an angry outburst, he has a beginning of a remedy for himself. Now that he has some vitality from the anger, he can take it further and nullify the negative anger, and this will complete his rectification.

The classic example of this concept we find by the sin of the Golden Calf. After the people sinned with the Golden Calf, there was a death sentence on them, and they had a commandment from Hashem to kill each other. A man had to kill his own family members for sinning with the Calf. How could they act so cruel? To kill their own families?!

The answer is, by killing their own families, they were using the element of fire, at its zenith. Fire can rectify cruelty, and therefore, they were not being cruel to each other by killing those who sinned with the Calf.

### *Using Cruelty For Holiness*

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Earlier [in the previous two chapters], we discussed the nature of internal hardening in the element of earth, which can lead to the traits of evil stubbornness and brazenness. We also mentioned a third kind of hardening – when one’s *da'as* [his mind] becomes hardened, when he becomes set in his negative way of thinking.

Cruelty can also stem from a hardening of one’s *da'as*. But a person can be firm in his *da'as* for holiness, and in this way, his cruelty is holy. We find this concept in the following statement of the Sages: “A Torah scholar must be cruel towards his children like a raven.”<sup>150</sup> This is a holy kind of cruelty.

By contrast, Bilaam was someone who possessed an evil kind of *da'as*, and he wished to obliterate the entire Jewish people with his curse. His impaired *da'as* enabled him to use cruelty for evil.

When a Torah scholar has to act “cruel” for holiness, where is this cruelty coming from? Is it coming from the coldness of earth? Chas v’shalom (G-d forbid)! *Chazal* are specific to say that he must be cruel like the raven, as opposed to a mountain goat or a snake, because a raven has a value for life [as we explained earlier]. But instead of using the raven’s cruelty for evil, the Torah scholar uses the raven’s cruelty for something good and holy [to continue to learn Torah, even though his family is begging him to stop learning Torah and go make a living]. The cruelty he must exercise towards his family is not coming from the coldness of earth, but it is rather coming from a higher source – from holiness.

A Torah scholar is required to have *da'as*. If he doesn’t have *da'as* [if he is not firm in his beliefs], *Chazal* say that he is worse than a carcass. Thus, a Torah scholar has to act “cruel” towards his family by continuing to learn Torah in spite of the fact that they might be begging to him to go make a living and support them. It is cruelty being drawn forth from a holy source, so it is a “holy” kind of cruelty.

Now we can understand the following point, which is very deep. A Torah scholar’s cruelty, the holy kind of cruelty, is because he disconnects totally from this world, instead basking in spirituality. This is a kind of “cruelty” towards the world which comes from the inner depths of the soul, and it is a holy source of cruelty. In this way, a Torah scholar is so connected to spirituality that he feels like a stranger towards this physical earth; feeling like a “stranger”, as we said earlier, is the root of cruelty [because *zar*/stranger is contained in the word *achzar*/cruel], but here it is being used for holiness.

Of course, if he remains only with his holy cruelty, then he is incomplete. He needs to also deal with the world and show mercy to others, and in this way he balances out his holy cruelty.

Beyond a Torah scholar’s holy kind of cruelty, we can find an even deeper kind of holy cruelty. *Chazal* say that when a righteous person prays to Hashem, Hashem changes His trait of cruelty into compassion.<sup>151</sup> How can we say that Hashem is cruel, *chas v’shalom*? It is not the regular kind of ‘cruelty’ that we understand, which comes from coldness in earth. It is coming from the *da'as* of Hashem, the source of all holiness. If we want to have some idea of

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<sup>150</sup> *Eruvin 22a*. *Rashi* explains that a Torah scholar must continue to learn Torah even if his family is begging him to go out and make a livelihood so they can have food to eat.

<sup>151</sup> *Sukkah 14a*

it, a Torah scholar uses his *da'as* to act cruel for holiness, as we mentioned above; this bears somewhat of a resemblance to the holy ‘cruelty’ which Hashem uses.

Hashem has different modes in which He deals with the world. Sometimes He is compassionate to us, like a merciful father. Sometimes Hashem has to remind us that He is exalted, and then He has to exercise cruelty so that we get the message. Hashem has to show a degree of ‘cruelty’ sometimes to us so that we should realize that He is totally above us. No matter how holy we become, we can never become as holy as Him.<sup>152</sup> The fact that He wants us to recognize this differentiation is called His “cruelty”, because in this way He shows some distance towards us, and it is necessary for us.

### ***Balancing Cruelty and Compassion In Our Life***

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To apply this concept in our own life, our soul has to be developed in that we maintain a healthy balance between showing compassion and showing cruelty. The Zohar says that if a person acts merciful, but he doesn’t know how to be zealous for Hashem like Pinchos, then he is not really merciful.<sup>153</sup> If a person is too soft-hearted and he doesn’t know how to be firm when he has to - he is missing the holy cruelty which a Torah scholar must exercise – then it shows that he is too attached to this world, and he is not a true Torah scholar.

A true Torah scholar is someone who lives the wisdom that he learns, and thus he comes to feel like a stranger towards this world, and this is how he shows holy ‘cruelty’. Of course, if he goes extreme with this and he remains with only holy cruelty, and he never shows compassion, then he is also not a true Torah scholar.

A person needs to be able to exercise either compassion or cruelty, depending on the situation, and there must be a fine balance between the two. Understandably, a person has to know when and where to use compassion or cruelty. One needs to be compassionate and get along with people, but he also needs to be ‘cruel’ in the sense that he needs to disconnect from the physical world, such as in the case of a Torah scholar, that even if his family is begging him to go make a living so that they can have food to eat, he must disregard their pleading and continue learning Torah.

This is hinted to in the word *achzar/cruel*, which contains the words *ach/brother* and *zar/stranger*. In other words, the perfected kind of cruelty is when one knows how to treat another person like his brother, exercising compassion when he should; and he also knows how to act like a “stranger” to this world, which is using cruelty for holiness. So the true, perfected kind of cruelty is when the cruelty is balanced out with the ability to also exercise compassion.

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<sup>152</sup> *Beraishis Rabbah* 90:2

<sup>153</sup> *Zohar Beraishis* 245a

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Another trait which comes from our element of earth in the soul is the middah of hatred (sinah). It is forbidden by the Torah to hate another Jew: “And you shall not hate your brother in your heart.”<sup>154</sup> In addition, besides for how we must not hate another Jew, we have a commandment to love every Jew: “And you shall love your friend like yourself.”

Hatred is only when it is dormant in one’s heart. If one verbalizes his hatred to another or he takes action against the person he hates, he does not violate the Torah prohibition of hating another Jew.<sup>155</sup> [He is doing something else wrong, of course, by hurting someone, but the point is that it’s not considered by the Torah to be called hatred].

When are we allowed to hate someone? The *Gemara* brings a few scenarios.<sup>156</sup> If a person sees another person deliberately committing a sin even after the person was warned, the sinner is considered to be a wicked person, and one is allowed to hate the wicked person. Another example is that if someone could have testified for a friend to prove him innocent in court, yet he did not go testify for him; there is an argument in the *Gemara* if we may hate such a person.

The *Gemara* says, however, that if we see this “hated” person in need help to unload his donkey, we must stop to help him, so that we should overcome our hatred towards him. The *Gemara* also says that it is permissible to hate someone who brazenly admits that he sins and he does not repent<sup>157</sup>; this is the same concept as the above quoted *Gemara*, in which it is permitted to hate the wicked.

Why are we allowed to hate a wicked person? The *Gemara* says that it is because he is not called “your brother.” The possuk says that we are not allowed to hate our fellow, brother Jew, but a person who is wicked is not considered to be our brother. According to another opinion in the *Gemara*, not only is it permitted to hate a wicked person, but it is even a mitzvah to hate him.

This is a brief, general description of the discussion in the *Gemara* about when it is permitted to hate. Now we will delve into this, with the help of Hashem, and we will try to understand what exactly hatred is, and where it comes from; how hatred can be used either for good or evil.

***Three Kinds of Hatred***

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<sup>154</sup> *Vayikra* 19:17

<sup>155</sup> *Sifrei*; brought in *Rambam Hilchos De’os* 6:5, and in *Sefer HaChinuch*

<sup>156</sup> *Pesachim* 113a

<sup>157</sup> *Taanis* 7b

We said earlier that hatred is rooted in the element of earth. We can see this from Adam. Adam was cursed with “And to earth you shall return.” In addition to this, he was cursed with “And I shall place a hatred between you and between its (the Snake’s) offspring.” Hatred is thus associated with the element of earth.

Earth is the root of the trait of hatred. However, the reasons that cause hatred don’t always come from our element of earth. Hatred can be caused by the other three elements as well – either from water, wind, or fire.

First we will study the three different causes for hatred – hatred that either comes from fire, wind or water - and then we will examine the root kind of hatred, which comes from our earth.

### ***Hatred Stemming From Fire: Hating Another For Being Of Higher Status***

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One cause for hatred is coming from our element of fire. Rav Chaim Vital wrote that that hatred is a branch of arrogance, which is rooted in fire. With this kind of hatred, a person hates another person because he feels that that another is of higher status than him, and he resembles a fire, which seeks to go higher. When a person feels that another is on a “higher” level and thus he views the other as being “better” than him, he can come to hate him, because he feels lowered by the other person’s high status.

This is actually the same kind of hatred which is behind the phenomenon of Anti-Semitism. The Sages say that when Hashem gave our nation the Torah, the non-Jews began to hate us.<sup>158</sup> This is because when we received the Torah, we had officially become elevated over the rest of the world, and now the other nations saw how we were higher and better than them, causing them to feel low about themselves. Such hatred is a hatred that comes from the element of fire in the soul; soon, we will explain this a bit more.

### ***Hatred Stemming From Water: Hating The Opposite Of What You Like***

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Another kind of hatred is caused by our element of water. The *sefer* Tanya writes that that the more a person loves something, the more he hates its opposite. For example, the more a person loves Hashem, the more he hates evil; Dovid HaMelech said, “Those who hate You, Hashem, I hate; those who fight You, I will fight”<sup>159</sup>. Evil is the opposite of Hashem’s will, and when a person loves Hashem very much, he will naturally fight evil. When a person loves something, he hates whatever it isn’t.

The word “love” is ahavah in Hebrew, which has the same numerical value in Hebrew as the word echad, “one”. The word “hatred” is sinah, which has the same root letters as the word sheini, two. This alludes to how when two people love each other, they feel like they are one, and when they hate each other, they feel apart from each other, as two separate entities.

Such hatred is caused by water in our soul. This is when a person hates others who aren’t to his liking or taste. The more a person likes something, the more he will hate its opposite.

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<sup>158</sup> *Shabbos 89a*

<sup>159</sup> *Tehillim 139:21-22*

### *Hatred Stemming From Wind in the Soul: Oppositions*

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A third kind of hatred is caused by our element of wind in the soul. First, let us understand something about wind. Wind is unique among the elements in that it has four different forms. Fire, water and earth are always the same, but wind has four different directions – east, west, north and south.

When wind is moving in one direction and it encounters wind from an opposite direction, an opposition takes place. Each of the four winds are constantly moving in different directions, because of each of the winds serves a unique purpose. This also reflects the concept of hatred stemming from differences, which we discussed above, when two people see each other as being two separate entities that are apart, allowing for hatred. Winds also have different directions they go in, so wind can also be a cause for differences, thus, hatred can also stem from wind in the soul.

We can see the soul's wind as a cause for hatred between people, as follows. When a person meets another who opposes him, he feels challenged, and this causes him to hate the other. Such hatred comes from the wind in one's soul. Even when a person meets another who is "different" from him – a person who has a different kind of life than he does – it creates a possibility of hatred toward the other, because people can have a hatred for those who are simply "different" than them. People feel challenged by others who live and think differently than they do.

This kind of hatred is very common in our generation. Unfortunately, different kinds of Jews can have a hatred for others kinds of Jew who belong to a different group (whether the other is Chasidic, non-Chasidic, a different Chassidus than mine, Sephardic, etc.), simply because the other lives and thinks differently than he does. It is not because they see faults in the other; it is an entirely different kind of hatred: the person feels, "I hate him, because he is so different from me!"

All in all, these are three causes for hatred: fire, water and wind. The root of all hatred is earth, though, which we haven't yet explained. Now we will explain it.

### *The Definition of Hatred: Being Apart*

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The definition of hatred is essentially to be apart from the other. Either we are required to be apart from the other (like when we are supposed to hate the wicked), or we are apart from another for no reason – baseless hatred. Either way, the concept of hatred is to when we are separate from one another. By contrast, love is to be at one with another.

The reasons that cause us to feel separate from others are many, either as a result of our elements of fire, wind or water. But hatred, which is *sinah* in Hebrew, comes from the word *sheini* (two). When a person has hatred, he sees the other as a "second" person, as a result of not feeling one with him. When a person doesn't feel one with another, he feels like there are two separate people here – the entire idea of hatred.

As we brought before from the words of our Sages, the Torah prohibition of hatred is only transgressed when it remains in one's heart towards another, without being actualized. If a person verbally attacks someone, it is not considered hatred! [It is a different prohibition though – the prohibition of hurtful speech]. Only when a person keeps the hatred privately in his heart do the Sages consider it to be hatred which is not allowed by the Torah. What is the depth behind this?

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It is as we are saying: Since hatred is to feel apart from one another, hatred can only be when it is dormant in one's heart. Hatred is basically an outlook that the person has – an outlook which says that “I am apart from the other”. When a person verbally attacks someone, he is acting mean of course, but it's not because he has an outlook of hatred towards the person. Only when a person hates someone in his heart and doesn't show it to the person does he really hate the other, because hatred is an outlook inside the person, that the person adapts the attitude of feeling apart from another. Such an outlook is only felt in one's heart. Once a person acts upon the hatred, it is no longer an outlook of hatred that resides in his heart, and it instead becomes an action of disparity towards the other person, but it has left his heart and instead it has become an aggressive action upon another.

[Thus, hatred is only hatred as long as it's kept in the heart. When it is released outward, it is a different issue, which is also a problem that needs to be dealt with but the point is that it's not “hatred” anymore.]

### *The Element of Earth Actualizes One's Hatred*

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We have defined hatred. Now let us explain why verbally offending someone else is not hatred. In order to understand this, we need more understanding about the element of earth.

The Sages say that there are three people whom Hashem hates: A liar, one who doesn't testify for his friend, and one who testifies alone for an illicit relationship.<sup>160</sup> Why does Hashem hate these three specifically?

We will explain why, but let us first understand something else in order to answer this. From all of the elements, only earth is a non-active element. Wind, water and fire are active forces. But earth contains no power of its own. All it can do is bring the other three elements to their potential.

When the element of earth is used for a constructive reason, it brings the other three elements to their completion. But if it is used for evil purposes, it uses the elements and utilizes their potential in an incomplete way, which will have detrimental effects. Having understood this, we can now understand why Hashem hates these three kinds of people specifically.

One kind of person whom Hashem hates is a liar. A liar doesn't tell what it's in his heart. A liar essentially is misusing his element of earth, because he isn't utilizing his speech properly. He has failed to properly use his element of earth, because he didn't say the truth. What he says is different than from what is really going on in his heart –and therefore, he is hated by Hashem. To be “different” means shinuy in Hebrew, which comes from the word sinah (hatred). Since a liar is acting different than how he should – by saying something that is not in line with the truth he knows in his heart - he is hated by Hashem, because now that he has made himself different from what he really is on the inside, he becomes hated.

This also helps us understand why someone who verbally attacks another isn't transgressing the sin of hatred: it is because this person is not acting differently than what is in his heart. The real problem of being different is not when one is different from someone else, but when he is “different” within his own self. A liar is different from within his own self, because he isn't telling the truth, and so he is hated by Hashem. The same can be said of a person who hates another in his heart but doesn't show it – this is true hatred, because he is acting different within his own self.



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It is only when one keeps hatred in his heart that it is considered hatred, because he is acting different from what he really feels. But when one verbally insults another, he isn't being different from what he really feels, so this cannot be called hatred.

The second kind of person whom Hashem hates is one who doesn't testify for his friend when he is able to. His problem is that he isn't verbalizing what he knows in his heart. This is different than a liar, whose words are not in line with his heart. But this person is also transgressing the sin of hatred, because he is also acting "different" than what he knows deep down.

The third kind of person whom Hashem hates is one who testifies alone about another's illicit relations. Such a person is misusing his element of earth in a different way: his actions do not produce results. The testimony of one person about someone else's illicit relationships is not accepted, so his actions have failed to result in anything. He is also hated by Hashem, because he has misused his element of earth; he is also a kind of liar.

### *The First Step in Fixing Hatred: Hating Evil*

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Until now we have spoken about the definition of hatred: Hatred is when one is apart from someone else, as a result from feeling "different" than others, considering others as "another", which is a lack of oneness with another. We have explained that this is when one uses the element of earth in an evil way.

Now we will speak of solutions to hatred.

The sin of hatred is that a person essentially feels that he is apart from another; he sees the other as a separate entity from himself, as someone "else" whom he is apart from, and this itself is the root of the hatred. The way to rectify hatred, then, is through becoming "apart" from the evil that is in the person – rather than feeling apart from the person himself who commits the evil.

The Sages say that it is permissible to hate the wicked (and according to one opinion, it is even a mitzvah to hate them). This is actually a part of fixing our evil hatred. We need to distance ourselves from evil, but what does it mean to hate a wicked person? The *sefer* Tanya explains that this doesn't mean to hate the sinner himself – G-d forbid such a thing. Rather, it means that we must love him as a person, but at the same time to hate the evil that he is doing. We need to both love him and hate him at once! In our actual behavior, we must keep a distance from him and not be involved with him.

Before we explain how to erase our hatred for another, the first step we need in fixing hatred is that we must know when to use it properly: we are required to hate evil and wicked people, as the Sages say. We must feel that wicked people are our worst enemies, and we are required to take action against them. We must hate them with utter hatred, as Dovid HaMelech says. If we do this, we rectify our own sin of hatred, by using hatred in the proper time when it is supposed to be utilized.

But the hatred that we need to uproot from ourselves is the evil kind of hatred, and this is when we hate others for the wrong reasons. We will now go through how we can uproot these kinds of evil hatred.

### *Fixing Hatred that comes from Fire*

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How do we get rid of our improper hatred toward others? It depends on where in our soul the hatred comes from.

If someone hates another because he feels that the other is “better” than him for being on at a higher and more successful level than him, such hatred comes from the element of fire in his soul. The depth behind this kind of hatred is because when one feels that another is “better” than him, he feels that the other is very apart from him. How can this hatred be fixed?

To stop hating him, the person needs to realize that he is mistaken in his thinking. He thinks the other who is “better” than him has taken his rightful place, and therefore he feels that the other person is putting him into a wrong place. But if the person realizes that he is in his right place – for he is supposed to be wherever he is supposed to be – by the same token, he can realize that the other person is also in his rightful place. Of him it can be applied the statement of *Chazal*, “Who is wise? The one who recognizes his place.”

With this change of attitude, the person will no longer feel that he is “lower” than the other, because he understands that they are both in their rightful places; they are both where they need to be. With this mentality, he will not feel that the other is apart from him, because he has uprooted the source of his grievances against the other person.

Compare this to a ten-story building. If a person who lives on the first floor, does he feel “lower” than the one who lives on the tenth floor? Certainly not. Each person feels that he is living in his rightful place. (In fact, the person who lives on the first floor probably enjoys his floor much more than if he would live on the highest floor, because he doesn’t have to walk up so many stairs.)

So a person needs to adopt an attitude that there is no such as thing as being “lower” than another person’s place in life, since we are all in our rightful place that we are each meant to be in. This will eliminate hatred to others whom we feel have it “better” than us in life.

### ***Fixing Hatred that comes from Water***

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Another kind of hatred comes from the element of water in the soul. This is when one hates whatever he doesn’t like. Here we come to the following subtle point.

The Maharal brings two different philosophical viewpoints if a person likes what is similar to him and he naturally dislikes what is different from him, or if it is really the opposite: that a person likes what is different from him, and dislikes what is similar to him. On a deep understanding, however, they are not really two different opinions, because both are really true; we will explain.

If a person only likes something that is similar to him, he will not be able to fix his hatred for others. But if a person is able to get himself to like even something that is different than him, than he will be able to love even those whom he previously hated.

When a person only loves someone or something that is similar to him, he hates what is different than him. (This is the idea we mentioned earlier, that *sinah*, hatred, comes from the word *shoneh*, “different”). But if a person learns how to love something that is different than his normal tastes, he will begin to find that he won’t hate others who are different from him.

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The *sefer* Tanya wrote that a person hates whatever is the opposite of what he doesn't like, but that is only for one who only likes what is similar to him. If one likes things that are different from him, he doesn't hate that which is different than him. He becomes more flexible.

On a more subtle note, really we all have two different kinds of love for others<sup>161</sup>. We can love what is different than us and love what is similar to us. If a person has only revealed from within himself a love for what is similar to him, he hates anything that is different from him. But when a person reveals from within himself a love for what is different from him, he won't hate that which is different from him; instead, he learns how to get used to something that is different from him, and he will actually come to love those differences.

How can a person uproot his hatred for what is different than him? He can realize that he doesn't have to hate everything that is different from him. He can become more flexible, getting used to things that are different from his initial tastes, and learn how enjoy different things from what he's used to.

If a person wants to work on this idea practically, he can do the following. He knows that there are some things he's not that fond of, but he also doesn't hate those things so much either. A person should get used to enjoying those things that are a little different from what he's used to enjoying, and with time, he will discover that his hatred for things that are different to his taste have lessened. He will learn how to like things that are very different from him.

A person should not try getting himself to like things which he doesn't like at all, though; this is impractical. Instead, a person should try getting used to things he doesn't like that much, which also doesn't bother him that much either.

Just like something different from a person's tastes can be a cause for his hatred, so can it be a cause for him to love it! By getting used to enjoying things that are a little different from you, you become more flexible, and then you will find that not only has your hatred gone down for the things you never enjoyed, but that you can even enjoy those things you used to hate.

This doesn't mean that a person has to try to overcome his Yetzer Hora totally and force himself to love things he hates. We just mean that something different can also become a cause for why the person loves it. We mean that a person should get used to liking things that he doesn't hate so much in the first place, and this gets him used to enjoying something different than what he's used to. The point is to get used to enjoying something different.

### ***Overcoming Hatred For An Enemy***

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We can see this concept from the following halacha brought in the *Gemara*<sup>162</sup>: If a person sees two people unloading packages, and one of them is his friend and the other is his enemy (who is a wicked person, whom one is required to hate) – there is a special mitzvah to help one's enemy unload, “in order to overcome his evil inclination.”

Why is one required to overcome his evil inclination toward a sinner, if we are required to hate him? Tosafos<sup>163</sup> answers that since the onlooker hates him, the other one will naturally hate him too, for it is written, “Just as water reflects a face to another face, so does the heart of a man reflect to another.” Therefore, the onlooker comes to hate

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<sup>161</sup> Refer also to *Getting To Know Your Home*, Chapters 1-2 and Chapters 6-7.

<sup>162</sup> *Bava Metziah* 32b

<sup>163</sup> *In Pesachim* 113b

him personally, because now he knows that other hates him; the hatred now becomes personal. Thus, it is his evil inclination telling him now to help the other, and so he must overcome his evil inclination and help him instead.

From here we learn that there are two kinds of hatred: One kind of hatred is to hate another person for being evil, and a second of hatred is to hate the other because one feels, “He hates me, therefore I hate him as well.” What is the difference between the two kinds of hatred?

When a person hates a sinner for being wicked, it is still possible for him to love him at the same time. (This we explained before: to hate the evil he does, but to love him as a person). But when the hatred becomes personal – “I hate him, because I know that he hates me for hating him” – such hatred creates a separation and distance between them, and such hatred is the kind that one must try to overcome.

If a person does succeed in overcoming his evil inclination not to help his enemy, he will find that he both loves him and hates him at the same time. He hates the evil in the sinner – but it won’t be personal. It is like what *Chazal* say of Moshe Rabbeinu and Dovid HaMelech had enemies, but they did not hate any of their enemies on a personal level.<sup>164</sup>

This is how we fix the kind of hatred that comes from our element of water – by revealing love towards the one we hate.

### ***Fixing Hatred that comes from Wind***

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The third kind of hatred a person can have comes from the element of wind in the soul. We explained that this kind of hatred is when a person hates another person who is different from him, because he feels challenged by another person’s different way of life. How can a person fix such hatred?

The *sefer Tanya*<sup>165</sup> says that the way to uproot such hatred is by being compassionate to the other person. We will explain how this solution.

The *Gemara*<sup>166</sup> says that a father cannot hate his child. Why doesn’t a father ever hate his child? The simple answer one would say is that because a father loves his child, he cannot hate him, because love and hatred cannot co-exist.

But there is more depth to this. It is written, “Like a father has compassion on his son.”<sup>167</sup> A father doesn’t hate his child, not just because he loves him, but because as soon as he thinks of a possibility of hating him, his fatherly compassion is immediately aroused. Once his compassion is aroused, he cannot hate his child.

This doesn’t mean that a father cannot have a reason to hate his child. It is very possible that there is good reason for the father to hate the child, such as when the child is acting very improper, to the point that he can get his father to feel hatred to the child. But as soon as the father thinks of hating his child, he feels compassion toward him.

Why does compassion on another person take away our hatred for him?

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<sup>164</sup> *Sotah 9a*

<sup>165</sup> *Tanya: 32*

<sup>166</sup> *Sanhedrin 105a*

<sup>167</sup> *Tehillim 103:13*

The entire idea of love is to be one with another. By contrast, hatred is to be apart and separate from another. When a person hates another person, how can he become one with him? Obviously, he has to try to love the person, but how? How can a person become one with someone whom he is apart from?

The answer is that really, it isn't possible at this point to love the other person. You cannot love someone whom you feel apart from. But what you can do is to feel sorry for him, in spite of the fact that you do not love him. And if you feel sorry for him, your hatred towards him will be eliminated.

Although it is only a father has true compassion on his son, we all have the ability to have compassion on others, just like Hashem "has mercy on all His creations." Compassion on another is possible even when one doesn't love the other!

Even if a person hates another because the other "turns him off", the very fact that the other person acts so differently can be a catalyst to awaken one's compassion on him. The trait of compassion, which is called rachamim, is called the "middle line" that runs between the point of love and hatred. Compassion/rachamim serves as a bridge between love and hatred, so it can connect them.

The holy sefarim indeed describe compassion (rachamim) as the "middle line" - love is called the "right line", while hatred is on the "left line", as they are the two extremes, and compassion is the bridging point between them.

The opposite of hatred is either love, or it can be compassion, without love. How do we see this?

The *Gemara*<sup>168</sup> says that "Anyone who doesn't speak to his friend out of enmity for three days is his enemy." Why three days? The Maharal writes that we always find that the number "three" is associated with connection. *Chazal* say that a person has compassion on his descendants – for up to three generations. This is how we see that compassion erases one's hatred for another. When there is compassion on another person, his hatred goes away; even if the person feels a hatred towards the person, his compassion will immediately awaken and overcome the hatred.

Being compassionate on another can only be a solution for the kind of hatred that comes from wind, which is to hate someone who is different than you. It cannot work for hatred that comes from fire, which is when one hates someone whom he feels is better than him.

### ***Sinas Chinam: Baseless Hatred***

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Finally, there is a fourth kind of hatred, and it is rooted in the element of earth in the soul. It is called "sinas chinam" – "baseless hatred". What is baseless hatred?

Rashi<sup>169</sup> says that this is to hate someone even though the other has committed no sin.

What we can learn from his words is that even if a person acts improperly and one feels a complaint toward him, still, it is unjustified to hate the other person, because the other person did not commit any sin which makes him deserving of being hated. When a person hates another and there is no mitzvah to hate him, this is called baseless hatred, even if the other person is acting improper!

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<sup>168</sup> *Sanhedrin* 27b

<sup>169</sup> *Shabbos* 32b

But there is even more depth to this matter: Baseless hatred is to hate someone for no reason at all.

Until now we mentioned three different causes for hatred: either because the other is of higher status than me (fire), or because he isn't to my taste (water), or because he is different from me (wind). But the fourth kind of hatred, baseless hatred, which is rooted in the element of earth, is the total kind of hatred. It is an illogical kind of hatred.

Just like a person is able to love another without having a reason – like when the other person finds favor in his eyes (“chinam” comes from the word “chein”, which means finding favor<sup>170</sup>), so is a person able to hate another for no reason.

Why do people hate others for no reason? The person with *sinas chinam* thinks: “I am not him, and he is not me.” That is his only “reason” to hate him. A person with a tendency towards egotism is likely to hate anyone, simply because no one else is him. This is the depth behind *sinas chinam*. The person with *sinas chinam* feels that anyone who isn't “him” is apart from himself, so he can come to hate anyone.

This is actually the same kind of hatred as Anti-Semitism. The Sages said that when Hashem gave us the Torah, “a hatred descended upon the world on the non-Jews” toward us.<sup>171</sup> What is the root of their Anti-Semitism, and why did they begin to hate us only after Hashem gave us the Torah? It is because they now realized that we are “apart” from them: We are a “nation that dwells in solitude, and with the nations we do not think.” The fact that they see us as apart from them is the reason for their hatred.

Another example of baseless hatred is the hatred that ignorant people have for Torah scholars: “The hatred that the ignorant have for Torah scholars is greater than the hatred that the other nations have for the Jewish people, and the wives of ignorant people hate them even more.”<sup>172</sup>

An ignorant person's hatred for a Torah scholar makes no sense. An ignorant person hates a Torah scholar simply because they are not the same; because he sees the Torah scholar as his opposite. That is true; a Torah scholar and an ignorant person are exact opposites. An ignorant person is materialistic, while a Torah scholar is totally intellectual and non-materialistic. The wives of ignorant people hate Torah scholars even more, because a woman is more materialistic than a man. They are the perfect opposite of everything that a Torah scholar represents, which is total non-materialism. Their hatred for Torah scholars is thus total – and it is baseless.

To have baseless hatred for someone else is to simply feel apart from the other, even though when there is no logical reason to hate the person.

### ***Fixing Baseless Hatred***

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Baseless hatred requires a lot of work to fix. It requires us to reach very deep into ourselves, if we want to uproot it. We know that the Second Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because of baseless hatred.<sup>173</sup> Why did baseless hatred destroy the Beis HaMikdash?

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<sup>170</sup> A quote from the *Vilna Gaon*.

<sup>171</sup> *Shemos Rabbah* 2:4

<sup>172</sup> *Pesachim* 49b

<sup>173</sup> *Yoma* 9b

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The Beis HaMikdash was a structure made up of many stones unified into one piece. The idea of baseless hatred is the opposite of the Beis HaMikdash – it is all about feeling separate from others, the opposite of unity. Thus, baseless hatred and the Beis Hamikdash could not co-exist.

So how do we fix *sinas chinam*/baseless hatred? Through *ahavas chinam*, baseless love – to love the other without a reason! The pure kind of love we need to have for others is to love others even when there is no reason to love the other person! It is to love another because a person recognizes that we are all one unit. Just like you don't get angry at your hand if it accidentally bangs into your other hand - because both of your hands are part of one unit, yourself - so are we supposed to look at others as those whom we are "one" with. We have no logical "reason" that we need to unify with others – rather, it is because in essence, we were all originally one unit.

Of a man who gets married, it is written, "Therefore a man shall abandon his father and mother and cling to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." What is the depth behind the unity of a husband and wife? It is because they were all always one unit. If it would be that man and woman would be previously separated and now they have to unite, then they would have to need a reason to unify with each other. But because they were always one to begin with, they don't need any other reason to unite as one.

To hate others for no reason is essentially when one forgets his roots. He forgets that we, the Jewish people, are all really one unit; he thinks that we are just a bunch of branches without a root. But when one loves others for no reason, it is because he realizes that we all have one root, and that we are not all just random branches.

To hate another person is to feel apart from him. A person feels apart from another either because of the elements of fire, water or wind in his soul. These are all reasons that make a person feel apart from another, and thus these are only being affected by the branches of hatred. But when a person has baseless hatred, it is hatred itself! Such hatred comes from the element of earth in one's soul, because earth tends to be separate and be on its own; this we can see from earth, in that each seed planted in the earth has nothing to do with the seed next to it.

When a person reaches an inner place in his soul and he and realizes that every soul of the Jewish people has one root – and on a more subtle note, all of Creation is really also one root – he reaches his ability to love other Jews for no personal reason. Just like a person has no reason why he loves himself – he just simply loves himself - so can he love others for no reason at all. He can just love others in the same way that he loves himself.

This is the depth of fixing baseless hatred: leaving our feelings of being apart and separate from others, and instead realizing that we all are one, because at our root, we are all *echad* – "one".

## 011 | *Internal Dryness*

### *When A Person “Dries Up” Inside*

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The main aspect of the element of earth, as we mentioned in the previous chapters, is that earth is dry. In this chapter, we will learn about what dryness of the soul is – first we will analyze the matter intellectually, and then we will see how it can manifest in our own soul, for good and for evil.

When something is dry, it is missing its life-giving energy. There are levels of to how much something can be missing vitality; when all vitality is missing from something, it can be said of it that its dryness has become total.

We see this concept from the curse placed on Adam. When Adam was cursed with death, he was told “You are earth, and to earth you shall return.” Death was decreed upon him for eating from the tree, and along with this, he was told that his body would now return to earth, where it would dry up and disintegrate into the earth. At death, there is no vitality present in the body, so the body reaches a total level of its dryness, whereupon it disintegrates into the earth.

However, although dryness is the nature of earth, the total level of dryness is present not in earth, but in fire. This is because although earth is dry, it is also cold at the same time, which gives it some small degree of vitality. “Cold waters on a famished soul.” The cold can sometimes provide vitality. By contrast, fire is hot and dry; besides for the fact that it contains dryness, the heat of fire adds on its own individual cause for dryness, allowing for the total level of dryness. Thus, fire enables dryness on its ultimate level.

We will need to understand what this is, but this is the general outline: dryness is rooted in earth, but this is not the total level of dryness. The total level of dryness is found in fire. Another way of describing it is that earth is the driest of the elements, while fire is the element which causes the most dryness.

### *The Good and Evil Uses of Dryness*

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How do we see dryness manifest in earth, and how do we see it in fire?

The Jews complained in the desert that they wanted to eat meat, rather than to eat manna. They said, “Our souls are dry”,<sup>174</sup> and Targum Onkelos translates this to mean, “Our souls are hungry.” When dryness becomes dominant in the soul, it causes a person to feel a certain hunger.

When a person is at the abject level of poverty, he is called an “evyon.” The Sages say that an evyon is someone who is so hungry that he wishes he could eat anything.<sup>175</sup> This is coming from internal dryness. It does not make someone feel like he’s missing vitality in his life, but rather, it makes a person hungry for anything.

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<sup>174</sup> Bamidbar 11:6

<sup>175</sup> Rashi to Devarim 15:4



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Earlier, we said that the definition of dryness of the soul is when a person has lost all his vitality. When a person dries up inside himself and he feels like he has no vitality, he gets hungry for everything that there is. Why? This is because if he would have a bit of vitality left in himself, he would only be hungry for things that he needs, not things which he doesn't need. But when all of his vitality is depleted within him, he will get hungry for anything, even for things he normally doesn't get hungry for.

This is what happens to an *evyon*, a poor person who becomes so poor that he is desperate to eat just about anything. He is desperate to fill himself with some vitality, since he has no vitality inside himself. Thus, dryness stemming from the element of earth can stir on a person's hunger – the person will yearn for anything that gives him vitality. As we explained, the coldness present in earth is what accompanies the dryness.

By contrast, dryness coming from the element of fire is accompanied by the warmth of fire, and this is a different kind of dryness. It causes a person to despair! The word for despair in Hebrew is *yeiush*, which comes from the word *aiish*, "fire." This hints that fire can dry up a person so much to the point that he totally despairs. When a person dries up inside himself, this is defined as a lack of vitality in the person. What happens to a person when he feels like he has no inner vitality left in himself? Either one of the following two possibilities will happen.

When a person feels crushed and hopeless, *Chazal* say, "Even if a sword is on a person's neck, he should not despair from Hashem's mercy." When a person has reached total inner dryness – in other words, when he feels that he is staring death in the face – it is precisely that inner dryness that he feels which can spur him on to yearn for Hashem's mercy. He can become "hungry" for any signs of life that Hashem can grant him. In his moments where he feels like he wants to totally despair, it is precisely then that he has the opportunity to appreciate his life.

But, the other possibility is, that the person will totally give up. The person feels the "sword on his neck", so to speak, and he is apt to give up, thinking, "That's it. My life is over. No point in having hope for anything." What he doesn't realize, though, is that his very feeling of despair is what really causes him to give himself over to the reigns of hopelessness.

The concepts of despair (*yeiush*) and inner dryness (*yoivesh*) are polar opposites. When a person has inner dryness, *yoivesh* – stemming from his element of earth - he can be motivated to revitalize himself, because he feels the dryness. But when a person has too much *yeiush*, his inner dryness is coming from his element of fire, and he gets too dried up; the dryness here increases his negativity over his situation.

The letters contained in the word "yeiush"/despair are the letters yud, aleph, and shin. These letters can be rearranged to form the words "Yeish Aleph" – "There is only One", implying how a person has the ability to nullify himself to the Creator, precisely when he enters into despair. By contrast, the letters contained in the word *yoivesh*/dryness are yud, beis, and shin, which form the words "Yeish Beis" – "There is Two", implying how a person feels that he is separate and apart from the Creator; when he does not nullify himself to the Creator through his predicament.

To summarize, the difference between *yeiush*/despair and *yoivesh*/dryness is: *yoivesh*/dryness comes from earth, while *yeiush*/despair comes from fire. How can we see it? Fire can come and dry up water; it essentially takes the vitality out of the water which the water could have provided. When this goes on in the soul, a person despairs. A person in total despair is so negative about his situation that he thinks, "Even if I would somehow gain some vitality in my life, I would dry up." His inner fire is drying up his water, due to the heat present in fire, and causing all the water in his soul to evaporate. This is the despair which can come from one's element of fire. It is when the inner dryness becomes total.

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By contrast, dryness stemming from earth comes along with some coldness that is present in earth. The coldness in earth can help the dryness gain some vitality; because we find that coldness can provide vitality: “Cold waters on a famished soul.” Even though earth is dry, its coldness can provide some vitality and thus mitigate some of the dryness. It can make a person instead feel like the evyon, the pauper who will desperately seek anything to help sustain himself.

Thus, earth can provide a constructive kind of dryness, because it is a kind of dryness that will make a person seek vitality. Fire is the source of dryness that is destructive to the person, because it will make a person dry up too much to the point beyond the normal amount of despair.

### *Dryness From Earth: A Yearning For Vitality*

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Both fire and earth are the sources of dryness in the soul, but earth is the main source of dryness that is constructive. By contrast, dryness coming from fire saps a person out of his vitality. However, even dryness of fire can improve a person, by causing the person to feel totally nullified to the Creator when he feels that he is at the point of despair. As we explained before, this is alluded to in the word yeiush, which can read “Yeish Aleph” – “There is only One” – which hints to how a person can feel nullified to the Creator as a result of his hopelessness.

Earth, though, causes a different kind of dryness in the soul. It makes a person feel that because he has dried up and he feels despair, he will now seek to revitalize himself.

We see this concept in the physical world, from the idea of a beach. A beach is not part of the ocean, yet although it is not water, it provides vitality to people. It is the beginning of the land, and thus it provides vitality to people. In Hebrew, the beach is called yabashah, which is related to the word “yoivesh”/dryness. Hashem told the waters to gather together and form the beach. The beach is the beginning of land, the earth, and thus dryness stemming from the element of earth is a vitality-giving kind of dryness.

The ocean is not a place for people to live in, even though water is the source of vitality. We need to live on land; the beach represents the beginning of land, a kind of “earth” which sends us vitality, in spite of its dryness. Thus, dryness coming from our element of earth provides us with vitality. Our element of earth is dry, but it demands to be nourished and watered, so that it will gain vitality.

We can compare this to a person walking through the dry desert, and he has no water to drink. He becomes so thirsty that he will drink up any drop of water he comes across. This is a dryness stemming from the earth in the soul, which demands to be watered and filled. But if a person has given up on getting any water, he falls into total despair, and then his dryness is coming from his element of fire, which dries him up too much. This is when he loses hope that he can be rescued from his situation; when he despairs so much that even if he would get some vitality, his fire would quickly dry it up.

### *Removing Despair*

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In order to use the constructive dryness of earth, understandably, we need to remove the despair that is upon us.

When a person despairs, he feels that there is no hope for him to become revived, and that is the reason he despairs. By contrast, the evyon/pauper becomes desperate to gain some amount of vitality; he believes that he can

receive vitality. If a person is simply desperate for help but he has lost all hope for his situation, he falls into the trap of despair. But when a person, because he is so desperate, is able to get himself to throw away the feeling of despair upon him – he is using the constructive power of dryness in his element of earth (by thirsting for hope), and he has the key to receiving a new burst of vitality.

The elements that provide vitality to a person are wind and water. Wind contains moisture and heat, which are both factors that give vitality. Water is the prime source of vitality, providing both moisture and coldness that revitalizes a person. But there is another way how we can gain vitality, and it is by using the earth's dryness: when we demand for ourselves vitality. We can demand vitality either from water or from wind, but on a more subtle note, our very demand for vitality is what provides us with vitality!

This is how we can fix the dryness that comes from our element of fire, which causes us to despair. By using our dryness of earth – by desiring vitality – we are telling ourselves that it is possible for us to receive a new burst of vitality to our situation, and this will counter the fire that is drying us up inside.

We have explained thus far when dryness of the soul is constructive, and when it is detrimental. Now we will see how the elements of water, wind and fire can be used to fix the dryness of the soul [of earth].

### ***The Relationship Between Earth and Water***

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Now that we have explored the concept, we can understand the following additional point. The first time in the Torah that the word *yoivesh*/dryness is found in the Torah is when Hashem told the waters to gather together and form the *yabashah*, the beach. There is a fascinating point contained in this concept.

Of the four elements, the elements of fire, wind and water were revealed out in the open at the start of Creation. The “spirit”/wind of Hashem hovered over the waters, as the *posuk* states. As for fire, the Torah does not say explicitly about a fire being around at the start of Creation, but the *sefarim hakedoshim* reveal that when Hashem said “Let there be light” on the first day of Creation, there was already an original light that existed before Creation [but it did not shine like the light which Hashem created on the first day]. So the elements of wind, water and fire were revealed at the start of Creation.

But the earth was hidden. Although Hashem first created the sky and the earth, the earth was not yet visible. The world was entirely covered with water. On the second day of Creation, Hashem told the waters to gather together and form the beach, and then the surface of the earth became visible. The earth was around before, of course, just as much as the other elements; but the other three elements were already revealed at their start, whereas earth was hidden from its start, and it only became visible at a later point. Since the earth was originally covered with water, the earth looked like the water.

The earth was not covered by wind or by fire – it was covered by water. Although the wind was hovering above the water, it was not covering the earth, but it was rather floating on top of it. Wind does not conceal things, unless it gathers dust, whereupon the dust will swirl through the air and cover things. But even then, the wind itself never covers things. Water, however, covered the entire earth at the beginning of Creation. Although water is clear, it still served to be a great covering of the earth. So earth was covered and hidden at the beginning of Creation, by water.

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This shows us the following insight. At its original state, when earth was covered by water, the earth was not dry. It was covered by water, which meant that the earth could not be totally dry. Although earth is the root of all dryness, the earth was not dry in its root state of Creation. In the root state of Creation, the driest substance was fire.

The earth contains coldness in it, and this really comes from water, which was originally covering it at the start of Creation. Afterwards Hashem made the waters form the first beach of the earth, but the earth still retained its cold properties from the water that had been covering it. The earth lost its moisture from the water, but the coldness from the water remained in earth; thus, earth is dry and cold.

Now we can understand why earth, although being dry, can still be a source of vitality to a person, in spite of the fact that it is dry. It is because in its original form, it was not dry, due to the water that covered it. [For this reason, the *sefarim hakedoshim* only consider fire, water, and wind to be the elements, and do not consider earth to be a “fourth” element - because at the root state of Creation, earth was integrated with the water].

### *Vitality From Earth: The Yearning For Vitality*

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In the Torah, we find two instances in which the waters receded to form land. One place was by the second day of Creation, in which Hashem told the waters to gather together and form the yabashah, the beach. We also find that when the sea was split, the floor of the sea became walkable, and it was called cheravah, “desolate land.”

When Hashem gathered the waters together and made the beach, He revealed a new kind of vitality. Normally, vitality comes from water, but the beach symbolizes a kind of vitality that can come even when water is dried up. When water is dried up, it is called both yabashah and cheravah. It is cheravah, because it is dry and desolate land. The word cheravah is rooted in the word churban, destruction, which hints to fire, the force of destruction. But it is also called yabashah, beach, which symbolizes a longing for vitality, like the poor person who is desperate for any vitality. This is a different kind of vitality than the regular source for vitality.

Thus, there are two kinds of vitality. One kind of vitality is when a person simply receives vitality, and it is drawn from the element of water in the soul, which is the source of vitality in the soul. But there is another way to gain vitality: when there is a very longing for vitality. This is a kind of “vitality” that is contained in our element of earth, because our earth is dry, and it can get so dried up to the point that it becomes desperate to cure its thirst, just as the pauper will take any source of vitality that comes his way.

This shows us that when a person yearns for something – and he believes he can get there, with *Emunah* – he can reveal a source of vitality in his element of earth.

Hashem told Adam after the sin, “Earth you are, and to earth you shall return.” The curse of death was placed upon mankind as a result of the sin; now a person would die, and his body is returned to the earth, where it decomposes. But in the future, Hashem will revive all the dead. When we believe in the coming of Moshiach and in the future revival of the dead, we reveal vitality from our element of earth, which longs to receive vitality.

The simple understanding of this is that the dead are placed in the ground, and in the future they will rise from the ground when they are resurrected, so we can see how vitality can come from earth. But the deeper understanding is as follows.

*Chazal* say that there is a part of the body which does not decompose: the luz bone, which does not any enjoyment from this world; all it enjoys is the Melave Malka meal, and therefore it enables the rest of the body to

become resurrected. Motzei Shabbos is a time in which a person loses his vitality; his soul is in mourning that it has lost its spiritual energy from Shabbos. Through the Melave Malke meal on Motzei Shabbos, we give our soul vitality, by revealing a yearning for vitality.

The very fact that our soul yearns for its lost vitality is exactly what gives it vitality! This is how we can see vitality being revealed through “earth”/the absence of vitality.

The earth has no vitality. Vitality can be drawn from the other three elements, while the earth itself is devoid of vitality. How, then, does the earth gain vitality? It gets vitality when the soul longs for vitality, since it doesn't have vitality of its own.

The destitute person, the evyon, has nothing to his name; he is therefore desperate for anything that will enable him to survive. Someone who has the basic necessities but lives with discomfort is called an oni, a “poor” person, but he is not as destitute as the evyon, who has not a penny to his name. The oni is poor enough to receive tzedakah, but the evyon is in a much direr situation; he's desperate for anything. The only thing keeping him going is his will to live.

This shows us about an amazing power in our soul. When a person feels like he is missing vitality, and he is desperate to get it - he can gain vitality from his very longing to have vitality!

Therefore, when dryness of earth gets too dominant in the soul – when a person dries up and feels like he has no vitality – this itself can be his remedy. Since he feels like he has dried up inside, he can use this as an opportunity to long for vitality, and that can provide him with vitality.

### ***Wants Vs. Needs***

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If the words until now have been understood, we can proceed further in this discussion, with the help of Hashem.

Earlier we mentioned that dryness in the soul brings on a hunger for something, which is called te'avon. We also know that “desire” is called taavah. What is the difference between desiring something, taavah, and thirsting for something, te'avon?

To know this, first we need to reflect on where they are rooted in the elements. Taavah, desire, is rooted in the element of water, as we brought earlier from the words of Rav Chaim Vital. A te'avon, a hunger, is rooted in the element of earth.

When the b'nei Yisrael complained of hunger in the desert, they complained, “Our souls are dry.” Hashem brought them quail, so they could have meat. The Torah calls this place “Kivros HaTaavah”, “the place where desires buried them.” *Chazal* criticize them for complaining.<sup>176</sup> Hashem gives us meat so that our hunger can be satisfied<sup>177</sup>, but not for the purpose of increasing taavah/desires.

Therefore, it is considered as if their desires buried them. They did not ask for meat out of necessity, but rather out of taavah for meat. When they asked for manna, however this was a justified request. They needed to eat something, or else they would starve. This was called te'avon, hunger, and it was a normal request. But the desire to

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<sup>176</sup> *Yoma 75a*

<sup>177</sup> *Chullin 84a*

eat meat was not a need, but rather a want. It was a taavah. They could have asked for out of te'avon/hunger, but they were asking for it out of taavah/desire, and for this, they are criticized by *Chazal*.

Thus, taavah/desire is when a person wants something he doesn't need. Te'avon/hunger is when someone seeks something he needs to survive. An evyon, a destitute person who has no money, is hungry for anything; his hunger is not coming from unhealthy taavah, but from te'avon. He seeks survival, and therefore he will pursue anything, but he is not doing so because he seeks indulgence.

However, there does exist a concept of taavah when it is used for holiness, and this is rooted in the holiest taavah in Creation – Hashem's desire to have a dwelling on this world.<sup>178</sup> Hashem “desires” to have a dwelling on this world, even though He is perfect and doesn't need to, because there is a concept of holy taavah. Hashem also “desires” the prayers of the righteous, even though He lacks for nothing. There is such a concept of holy taavah, but normally, a person has to be happy with what he has, as *Chazal* say, “Who is wealthy? The one who rejoices in his lot.”

By contrast, there is a different power in the soul, te'avon, which is a yearning to complete what one lacks. It comes from the dry nature of our element of earth, which seeks something whenever it feels lacking, and not because it has a desire for something unnecessary.

So there are two kinds of “wants” that we have. Sometimes we want to add onto ourselves, and this is called taavah. [It can be used for good or bad]. Or, we want something because we are truly lacking something, and we wish to complete our lacking.

Hunger is called te'avon, which connotes a desire, as in the possuk, “And if the woman does not desire to follow after you”. Why does a person hunger for something and want something? The word for desire, ratzon, comes from the word ratz, “to run”, which comes from the word aretz, earth. Thus, hunger is rooted in earth, because hunger is a ratzon, and aretz/earth is the root of ratz/ratzon/desire. When a person is simply lacking a little bit and he wants to complete what he lacks, this is not a hunger, but rather a desire for additional luxuries. But when a person is completely lacking and he desires to fill his lacking situation, this is te'avon/hunger, a ratzon that is rooted in the element of earth.

When ratzon stems from earth, it comes from the dryness of earth. From a simple understanding, dryness is a lack of vitality, but according to what we have explained here at length, the dryness in the element of earth can actually become a new source of vitality in the person. Just as heat in fire, the moisture in wind and the coldness in water can give vitality, so can we utilize the dryness of earth to give vitality!

This is the meaning of what is written, “Everything is from earth, and everything will return to earth.” Creation receives its vitality from the very fact that it has nothing of its own and that it depends on Hashem for survival – it gets vitality from this very yearning.

### ***How Longing Can Give Life***

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We can now add on another point. As we said, the element of earth demands vitality, since it naturally lacks vitality. The simple understanding of this concept is that earth can only get vitality from the other three elements, as we explained.

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<sup>178</sup> *Tanchuma, Bechukosai 3*

But according to what we have now explained, earth can get vitality from itself! The fact that earth longs for vitality is what can give it vitality. We can see this apparent from those who lose their sense of yearning; they despair. This shows us that if a person holds onto his longing for vitality and he doesn't despair, he gains vitality - from his very longing for vitality. One of our 13 Principles of Faith is, "I believe, with perfect faith, in the coming of Moshiach, and even though he tarries, even so, I await him." Normally, a person loses patience when he waits a long time for something to happen and it doesn't happen, and he gives up. But our belief in Moshiach teaches us that our very wait for him is what gives us vitality - "Even though he tarries, even so, I await him." The very awaiting for his arrival is what gives us vitality.

In the future, the element of earth will be rectified and completed through the other three elements. In our current time, though, how are we able to get vitality from the element of earth? How does the impoverished evyon survive when he isn't being supported by anyone? He can derive vitality from his very longing to live.

This is describing the deep concept that everything can be rectified from within itself, not just from outside itself. Earth can be rectified through the outside, which is to use the elements of water, wind and earth - or it can be rectified using the earth itself: when one has a longing to receive vitality, [and in turn, he gains vitality from this].

For this very reason, the more a person descends into his element of earth, the closer he is to rectifying himself through his element of earth, because he longs more for vitality. It is the deep concept that a problem itself can be turned into the remedy. It would seem that the ruination of something (kilkul) can only be rectified through tikkun, rectification. But sometimes, a tikkun can be achieved through the very kilkul, and the kilkul itself can become a tikkun! To illustrate, "Hashem creates worlds and destroys them."<sup>179</sup> It seems simply that Hashem destroys His previous creations and then He creates new ones in its place, but the deep understanding is that the very destruction is part of the renewal process.

The word churban/destruction is related to the word chibbur/connection, because destruction can be a catalyst for rebuilding.

Similarly, *Chazal* state that Moshiach is born on the day that the Beis HaMikdash is destroyed; in other words, when there is destruction, a new path that will be better than before is paved. It is not a coincidence that Moshiach is born on the day of the destruction. It is because the destruction itself gives birth to Moshiach. "We await for him, although he tarries" - how are we able to await Moshiach even though he tarries? It is because there was a destruction. Destruction took away our source of life; our entire vitality came from the Beis HaMikdash. When it was destroyed, from where are we to derive vitality from? From our very longing that it be rebuilt. Thus, the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash is really a new source of vitality.

Here we come to a deep concept: how death itself can really be life to us. Death is not just an end to life, and the resurrection of the dead will not be the only renewal of life that exists. Death can be a source of vitality for a person, because the more we endure destruction, the more we long for life.

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### ***Two Ways of Recovering From Our Spiritual Falls***

Herein lays a deep fundamental about our soul, and it is relevant to all of the failures that all of us go through in life.

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<sup>179</sup> Koheles 3:11

There is no person who does not fail. How do we react to our failures? One kind of person will fall into despair, while another kind of person manages to stay positive, believing that better days will come. But the true, deeper reaction is that a person can really derive vitality from his very longing to come out of his situation. A person who feels vitality from his longing is someone that is always spiritually alive. We will explain.

Hashem created man from the earth and breathed into man a soul of life. Our simple understanding is that our “soul of life”, our neshamah, is what provides us with life, and that the earth we come from is associated with death, not life. This is true, but according to what we said above, we really have two sources of vitality. Our basic source of vitality is our soul, and in particular, our vitality comes from the element of wind in the soul, because it was a wind that was breathed into us by Hashem. However, another source of vitality is our element of earth. Although the body returns to the earth after death, the earth which facilitates death can also facilitate life. The Sages said that when a righteous person dies, another righteous person is already in place to take him over.<sup>180</sup> The meaning of this is not just because the chain always continues, although that is also true. It is because when there is death, a new source of life is around the corner. Death can also be a source of vitality, it is just not so obvious.

The cemetery is called the beis hachaim, which alludes to this concept, that death is a source of vitality – it reminds us how much we long for life.

### *The Hidden Source of Vitality*

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We can now understand more deeply about what we began to discuss in the beginning of this chapter, that the constructive element of dryness is mainly found in earth, while total dryness is found in the element of fire. It is difficult to understand: If dryness in the soul is constructive when it comes from the element of earth, how can total dryness be found in fire? But according to what we have explained, just as the beach gives a possibility for life, whereas the sea doesn't allow for civilization, we can understand that the very dryness of the beach, which comes from earth, creates a source of life.

It seems that water provides sustenance, and not the dry beach. But if you think about it deeply, which of them enables people a place to live in – the beach, or the ocean? It is the beach which enables people to live on the land. Thus, the beach, the yabashah, from the word yoivesh/dryness, is what enables us to exist.

Since the beach is a life-providing source, the beach is not merely a place in which the water of the ocean recedes, which implies that it lacks vitality. Rather, it reflects how “Hashem destroys worlds and creates them” – destruction enables creation. If Hashem would have created us just as a soul, all of our vitality would come from our soul, and our dryness would not be a source of life to us. But we are currently in a world in which destruction must precede renewal, therefore, our main vitality is actually derived from our body/dryness, and not from our soul.

Our souls, when they are in Gan Eden, derive their vitality from the Source of Life, Hashem. When our soul is inside our body on this world, it gets its vitality from its longing to live. “Hashem desired a dwelling below”, thus, our soul is down below on this earth, not above in Heaven. It is mainly This World where Hashem finds His dwelling, so to speak.

Thus, dryness is a new source of vitality that we can discover. Someone who is dry sounds like someone who has no vitality, but from the perspective of the Torah, as we have seen, dryness can be a source of vitality. This new

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<sup>180</sup> Yoma 33b



source of vitality, dryness, is the secret of the entire Creation; it is not just another detail. All of Creation was created from the earth, and all will return to the earth. The purpose of Creation is not that we will become divested of our body and only have a soul. The purpose of Creation, according to the Ramban, is the resurrection of the dead – where we will be a soul inside a body, and not a soul without a body. (The Rambam, however, differs with this view). Why? It is because the deeper meaning of the purpose of Creation is that we are meant to connect the two sources of vitality together. Our purpose is not just to reveal the vitality of our soul as it is in our body, although that is also true. The deeper purpose is that our vitality comes from revealing the two sources of vitality.

The word Beraishis can also be read as “Beis Reishis”, that there are “two beginnings”. For our purposes, this means that that we have two beginning points where we can derive vitality from: our spiritual soul, as well as from our lowest element.

### *Torah and Tefillah*

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In other language, the Torah is a Heavenly sustenance that comes down to us from Above, while Tefillah/prayer comes from down below and gets sent above. We daven when we yearn for something, and this represents the kind of vitality that comes from our element of earth. The Torah is the source of vitality that comes from Heaven.

When one davens to Hashem, let's say he is davening for livelihood, is he getting vitality from just the livelihood? No! He is getting vitality from the very act of prayer! Tefillah itself is a life-giving source. The Kuzari states that we gain energy from each of the three tefillos throughout the day. We live from tefillah to tefillah. Thus, we have two deep sources of vitality in us – our Torah learning, and our Tefillos. These words need to become deeply absorbed in us, very clearly.

### *Vitality Amidst Failure*

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The depth that lays behind these words is that there really is no such thing as total “death” in Creation. We think simply that there is death, and that one day there will be a resurrection of the dead. That is true, but on a deep understanding, death is never total. A person who lives with this deep understanding is always alive. When he is spiritually elevated, he is very alive, connected with HaKadosh Baruch Hu. But even as he's amidst a failure, he can still feel vitality from his longing to have vitality. In this way, a person always has vitality, and it is just that there are different colors to vitality; and sometimes, he can experience even both kinds at once.

One who doesn't know of despair can either get his vitality from his connection to the Creator, and if he is going through failure, he can still get vitality from longing to be close to Hashem. There can always be vitality. There is only thing that can remove one's vitality: despair. When a person despairs, the dryness and the heat of his element of fire remove all his vitality. These words are very important, because our entire life is based on “A righteous person falls seven times and rises” – we go through many ups and downs, and we must know the proper way to go about them, both the ups and the downs.

Thus, dryness of the soul can really be an amazing source of vitality, for one who knows how to derive vitality from a situation in which he feels spiritually dry.

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The depth behind this is because when Hashem first created the earth, He created it with water already covering the earth. Thus, earth can always find a connection to water. When one understands this deeply and how it applies to his own soul, he will always be able to uncover water/vitality even in his situation of earth/dryness, and in this way, he can draw forth vitality wherever he is, because he always carries with him some “water”.

דע את מידותיך - מהות המדות 012 - בנין הכלים שבנפש

### **012 | *Becoming A Container***

#### ***Everything Has Its Place***

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Hashem designed Creation in a way that everything has a place where it belongs in; there is nothing which exists for no reason.<sup>181</sup> The deeper implication behind this concept, that everything has its “place”, is because everything needs a place that it can go into, where it will be held and retained, allowing the receiver to benefit from it.

In terms of our soul: if we don’t prepare a receptacle to be able to hold onto something, we won’t be able to hold onto that thing. This is known as building “containers in the soul.”

In other words: a person needs to build a spiritual “container” within himself that will enable all spiritual light to enter him, so that it can be maintained. This enables a person to hold onto the shefa (spiritual sustenance) that Hashem sends him.

Another term for this concept is described as the “student-teacher” relationship of the soul in which we can get our soul to become a “student” to what it is being taught by the “teacher.” Another term for this concept is to become a “receiver” (mekabel). When we enable our soul to receive the spiritual light that Hashem beams down into the universe, this is called building a “container” (kli) in our soul.

Throughout Creation, there is a concept of giver and receiver [Each of these concepts can be used for good or evil]. Man represents the “giver” in Creation, providing sustenance for his wife. Woman is known as the “receiver” in Creation, for the wife receives the sustenance from her husband. The word for “woman” in Hebrew is nekaivah, which comes from the word nekev, “hole”, alluding to how something can be put into a hole, where it is received and stored.

In the soul, we all need to utilize this “feminine” aspect as well, for holiness, and become “receivers” for spiritual growth. This is by building a “container” in our soul, for anything spiritual that we want to go into it.

A very prominent aspect of our Ein Sof is this concept, that we need to develop a “container” in our soul that receives spiritual growth and holds onto it.

We will reflect here a bit into how we can we can become a “container” for spiritual growth.

#### ***Using Our Earth To Become A Container For Spiritual Growth***

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<sup>181</sup> Avos 4:3

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If we do not hope for a certain spiritual gain, we aren't either interested in building a container for it. But if we have a hope for something, if we yearn for something, then this very willpower is what builds the container for the spiritual gains that we want.

A simple example that illustrates this idea is the concept of awaiting Moshiach. We say in Ani Maamin, "I believe in the coming of Moshiach, and even though he tarries, even so, I wait for him, every day, that he should come." The simple meaning of this is that in spite of the fact that Moshiach hasn't come yet, I still don't lose my faith in his arrival. But the depth behind is that my very yearning for Moshiach - which escalates day by day, since he hasn't come yet - is exactly what enables me to receive the spiritual light that is Moshiach.

Just as the vessels of the Beis HaMikdash needed to be stored in the place that was the Beis HaMikdash, so does the soul need a space in itself which can contain the light of Moshiach. How does this space become formed? It is through awaiting Moshiach. When the soul awaits Moshiach, this very longing itself is what can become the container that holds onto the light of Moshiach.

This concept continues what was discussed in the previous chapter, te'avon – a desperate hunger. This nature of the soul to have hunger is the root of how we build for ourselves a container in the soul that can hold onto the Heavenly sustenance which enters it. When a person had something and it is taken from him, he hungers for it. If he would have never had it in the first place, he wouldn't hunger for it. Only when someone already recognized something can he have a hunger for it.

The element of earth is also termed as the word "maneh", which means "vessel." The Maharitz<sup>182</sup> wrote that the element of wind, water and fire are the sustaining elements, while earth is the element that acts as the container to hold onto them and maintain them. We see from the physical world that earth takes up space and can be fashioned into containers that hold things. The earth in our soul is the power to build ourselves into a container that holds onto what we put into it.

Earth is the element which builds us into a container to receive spiritual gains, but as we have mentioned earlier, each of the elements contains aspects of all four elements, therefore, we can also use the elements of wind, water and fire as containers. Of course, earth is the main element that we need in order to build a container for the soul.

In the previous chapter, we explained the nature of the soul to have hunger, which is called te'avon, and this comes from the element of earth in the soul. It is a nature in the soul to yearn, to long for something, to await something. This is the root power of building a container in the soul [to hold onto and maintain spiritual gains].

We will see now how the active elements of fire, wind and water can be used as building containers for the soul. We will begin with fire.

### ***How Fire Can Help You Become A "Container"***

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Fire can act as a container when it uses its nature of opposition. A fire, by nature, is a force that is opposing and destructive to what comes in its path. This nature of fire can actually be used to form a spiritual container in the soul [as we will explain].

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<sup>182</sup> The glosses of the comments of "Maharitz" are contained within the text of *Sefer Nefesh HaChaim*.

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Water, by nature, is calm. Of course, when water keeps dripping against a rock, the rock becomes eroded over time, but water is mainly seen as a vitality-giving source, not as a force of opposition. Earth does not either oppose things, and wind, when it is dormant, does not either present a challenge. Sometimes we can find how each of these elements act in an opposing manner, but for the most part, they do not oppose things. The main element which acts as the opposing element is fire. Fire is opposing, because it is naturally destructive.

*Chazal* state that when a husband and wife are worthy, they merit the Shechinah, and if they are not worthy, a fire destroys them.<sup>183</sup> *Chazal* elsewhere state that if a husband merits it, his wife helps him, and if he does not merit it, his wife will oppose him.<sup>184</sup> Fire is the element that opposes; when a wife opposes her husband, a “fire” destroys them.

With regards to our current discussion – building a container in the soul – opposition can actually serve as a way to build a container. A wife is called *eizer k'negdo*, a helpmate for man, and the wife is also called the *kli* (container) of man, for the Sages say that a wife makes herself into a *kli* (container) to receive the husband. Thus, oppositions can form a container; the understanding of this is that the wife is *k'negdo*, an opposition, towards her husband, and this is exactly what forms a *kli* for the husband.

How does opposition form a container? When a person faces opposition, he needs to widen his own spiritual container, so that he can ‘contain’ the opposition. Thus, opposition acts a catalyst to strengthen and fortify oneself into a container that can deal with the opposition he faces.

What happens when the man does not wish to contain the opposition? He will be left without a container to contain the opposition, and the “fire” of the opposition will be destructive to him. This is the depth of the words of the Sages that a fire destroys husband and wife when they do not merit it – it is referring to the lack of building oneself into a container, which allows for the fire of the opposition between them to burn unstoppably.

When a person faces the fire of opposition, when husband faces opposition from his wife, he must know how to contain the opposition. What must he do? He must know how to widen his spiritual container, which will be able to bear the brunt of the opposition. In other words, he needs to know how to make peace.

The power of *shalom*, peace, is called a *kli*, a vessel or container, and in fact, the Sages state that the strongest container of blessing is *shalom*, peace.<sup>185</sup> It is necessary for one to make peace whenever there is opposition. Without opposition, there is no need to make peace; when one faces opposition, now is the time to make peace with the opposition. When one knows how to make peace with the opposition, he has the spiritual container that can deal with the opposition.

This is how one uses “fire” to build a spiritual container inside himself: when one faces the fire of opposition, he can use that very situation of opposition as a catalyst to make peace with the opposition.

### ***How Wind Can Help You Become A Container: Dealing With Different Situations***

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How can wind form one into a container? Wind is the root of movement, and moving and traveling causes one to become needy. Avraham Avinu was commanded by Hashem to leave his home and travel to *Eretz Yisrael*, where

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<sup>183</sup> *Sotah* 17a

<sup>184</sup> *Yevamos* 63a

<sup>185</sup> *Uktzin* 3:3

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he would be blessed by Hashem and made into a great nation; the Sages learned from here that normally, traveling on the road makes a person lose three things: not being able to bear children, loss of income, and loss of reputation. Additionally, we find that the halacha is that when someone is traveling on the road, he may receive charity of the public, because he is considered like a pauper. We see from this that traveling on the road, which is movement/wind, is a situation that causes one to become a receiver. Thus, we find that the element of wind can cause one to become a 'container' that receives.

Now we will apply this concept in more practical terms. When a person goes to different places, he meets all kinds of people, with all kinds of quirks and different personalities. One has to learn how to accept all kinds of different people in the world. Our Sages said, "Greet everyone with a radiating countenance." When you move from place to place, it's a situation that can reveal an ability in yourself to accept (and thus "contain") all of the people you come across.

In addition, when you have to go to different places, you need to find a place that will contain you. To start with, you need suitable living grounds to dwell on, and you need to eat, drink, and have ways of getting around town. All of this requires help from other people. When you are traveling and you need a place to stay, you enable your hosts to fulfill the mitzvah of having guests, which is a special kindness. So when you travel from place to place, you are enabling others to act as a "container" for you, since you are reliant on people for help.

Here is another practical example of the concept of becoming a "container". A child needs to be trained to accept certain things about life. When the child gets a little older, he has hopefully matured and he knows how to accept even harder parts about life. If an older child's level of tolerance towards difficulties hasn't changed since his younger years, he remains with a small tolerance level; he will have a hard time accepting things, and his ambitions have increased, which will now make it very hard for him to accept that he can't always get everything he wants. This is all because his power of acceptance hasn't been properly developed, and the depth of this is that he hasn't been properly trained into becoming a 'container'.

We can compare this to a person trying to squeeze an elephant into a box. When the container isn't wide enough, it cannot contain a big amount [and so too, when one hasn't learned how deal with small issues, he will have a difficult time dealing with the bigger issues of life when he gets older.]

So whenever there is movement, one needs to develop his inner container that can handle the increased movements. When you go through various "movements" in your life, you need to use those opportunities to make a container in yourself to handle the movements, or else you will get tossed around by all the movement.

To further illustrate, the Mishnah states that first a child learns Chumash, then Mishnayos, then *Gemara*, then *Halacha*, then *Agadta*. For every advanced stage that there is in learning, one must first be properly developed from the previous stage, so that he can be a container to hold onto the next stage. In whatever you are involved with, you need a container that can hold it.

There is a very common mistake which people make: A person studies a certain area, and then he attempts to study a different, unrelated area, with the same level that he was used to from the previous area he learned about. This kind of learning is not a recipe for success.

We are describing here the ability to handle changes – when you get moved around between various situations. When you go through changes to your situation, you need to develop a new container to contain the changes.

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Here is a very simple application of the concept: When a person gets married, he is moving from his parents' home and beginning a new home of his own. This is one change of situation. Then he has a child, and then he has another child, and eventually, he needs to move into a new home. With the more changes that one goes through, one needs to create an additional space in himself which can contain the changes and help him deal with them.

One needs to be pay attention to this concept throughout his life. Every person goes through various changes in his life, and many times, a person simply doesn't have the inner strength to handle the changes. This really stems from a lack of awareness to this concept that one needs to make a container in himself that can "contain" the changes. If a person would be able to develop new containers in himself throughout the changes he encounters, he would be able to properly handle the changes.

One of the reasons why people have such a hard time with changes is because each new situation requires a new kind of container to handle it, and a person attempts to handle his new changes with the same old tactics he is used to from previous situations - and this does not work. Each new change that a person goes through requires a person to come up with a new, original kind of container in himself to deal with the changes.

### ***How Water Can Help You Become A Container: Dealing With Changes***

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How can the element of water help a person form an inner 'container'?

Normally, water cannot hold things, but we find that when water freezes and solidifies, it can hold things. We can make the following observation from this. Water changes forms; and when it changes its form, this is what allows it to hold things. So the change of situation itself is what allows for water to become a container.

To illustrate, a child receives from his father, and a student receives from his teacher. When the father becomes a grandfather, the child has now become a father of a child, and now the child has become a giver to his own child; and when the student becomes a teacher and he has a student of his own, the student who once was a receiver how has now become a giver. What we see from this is that the very same thing can be viewed through different lenses, whereupon it is perceived as a different form.

Water shows us that the very same water changes depending on the situation it is in. When it is melted, it cannot contain anything, and when it freezes, it can contain things; but it is the same exact water. Water is the only element in which we can see this concept. With fire and wind, we cannot see how the same fire or the same wind takes on a different shape. With earth, although we can form things from it and change around its shape, only when we add water to earth can there be a change of shape to earth. Earth by itself, without the aid of water, cannot remain as itself and take on a different shape.

What we see from this is that the element of water can help a person deal with changes within the very same situation that he is going through, in contrast with the element of wind, which can only help a person deal with changes in relation to other people. There is a very big difference between water and wind with regards to this. Wind allows a person to deal with changes from place to place, while water can enable a person to deal with changes within the same situation. These are different kinds of "containers" that a person can develop within himself.

To give an illustration, the words of Torah always stay the same, yet one can find renewed pleasure in them every time he learns them. One does not need to always learn a new tractate of *Gemara* or a new discussion in the *Gemara* – he can find the same old words to be satisfying and new to him every time he learns the words. The Torah is

called the “tools of craftsmanship of Hashem” – the Torah is a tool, otherwise known as a kli (container), which can reveal many new angles of understanding to the very same words.

### ***Fashioning The Inner Container: Only Through Longing For Something***

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However, in the beginning of this chapter, it was explained that a kli/container is mainly formed through utilizing the element of earth in the soul, as opposed to the other three elements of fire, wind and water. Although we have explained how the other three elements can form an inner power to be a container [to handle opposition, differences, and changes], the main element in the soul which we need to make use of in order to build an inner container is earth.

Why? In the previous chapter, we explained that the element of earth is described as te'avon, a desperate hunger in the soul, a longing. This fits in very well with the concept we are currently discussing: the power to form an inner container. In order to form a container, one has to have a longing for this. When the soul longs for something, it forms a space in the soul that allows it to develop a container. If a person does not long for something, he will not be able to contain it.

(On a deeper note, when Hashem first created the universe, His existence first filled the entire universe, and then He created an empty space by retracting some of His space, so to speak. This was called the chalal hapanuy, the “empty space” that began the act of Creation. The soul has a yearning to return to the original situation, in which the entire universe was filled with Hashem’s Presence].

Although we explained how the elements of fire, wind and water can form an inner container, these can only be enabled by a longing in the first place to contain. If a person does not have this inner hunger to form a container in himself, then even if he tries to use the other elements, they will not be able to form a container. For example, even if a person tries to deal with oppositions, which is fire, the person will not be able to deal with the fire; the opposition will be too powerful for him to deal with. If he tries to deal with different situations, instead of being able to handle others, he will become overwhelmed by the changes. When trying to deal with changes in his situation, he will remain in the situation, unable to deal with the changes.

The only way to develop an inner container in the soul to deal with oppositions and changes lies in knowing how to use the element of earth. Earth contains aspects of the other three elements as well, but those are three ways of how to build the container; the power that fuels this entire ability in the first place is when one has a longing in his soul - a te'avon, an inner hunger.

When one does not uncover this ability in himself, his state resembles an inner imprisonment, exiled within himself.

### ***The Powers of Receiving and Giving***

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Until now, we have explained the roots of this matter. Now we will see how this applies to our *middos*, as well as to practically apply the concept.

A kli, a container, can accomplish two things. It can receive what you put into it, and it can also give something to another, such as when you put something inside it in order to give it away.

We find such a concept by the bikkurim, the first fruits, which were required to be given in baskets. The wealthy would bring it in gold and silver baskets, and the poor would bring it in reed baskets.<sup>186</sup> In either case, in order to bring the bikkurim, it had to be contained in a basket, whether one was wealthy or poor.

So we see that a kli/container can either receive what is put into it, for the sake of receiving, or it can be used as a container to give something. These two natures are also in the element of earth. Sometimes the earth receives and it does not give back what is put into it; an example of this is death, when the body is placed in the earth, and a dead person cannot give back to anyone who does kindness with enabling his burial. For this reason, burying the dead is called chessed shel emes, true kindness, since the deceased cannot give back anything in return, and those who bury him do a kindness with him without expecting anything in return. Other times, however, the earth receives something in order to give. When a seed is planted in the ground, the earth takes it in, so that it can sprout a plant. This hints to us that there is a holy way to use the power of receiving: when one receives something in order to give. In fact, earth is the most giving of all the elements, because when something is planted in the ground, the earth sprouts multiple amounts of the material.

Thus, the element of earth contains both of these natures: we find that it can receive without giving back (symbolized by burial of the dead in the earth), and we also find that it receives in order to give back (symbolized by plants).

### *The Trait of Kamtzanus/Stinginess*

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This is relevant to us as follows.

The nature in a person to receive without giving back is really what lays behind the evil trait known as kamtzanus, stinginess. A stingy person, a kamtzan, is also called “kili”, which is a combination of the words “kli li”, “The container is mine.” In other words, when a person receives without giving back, this is the trait of kamtzanus/kili.

Kamtzanus stems from an improper use of the soul’s power to become a container. When a person’s inner container is used for evil, it manifests as a power to receive without being able to give back, and this is one of the ways how the element of earth is used for evil.

To illustrate, there is one vessel which receives but cannot give back what is put into it: an earthenware vessel, which absorbs its contents. An earthenware vessel, if it becomes ritually impure, cannot become purified, unless it is broken into shards.

### *Yearning For Fulfillment Vs. Yearning For Shleimus/Spiritual Perfection*

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The two kinds of containers in the soul – a container that doesn’t give back, and a container that gives back – are manifested in our soul as follows. When the soul has a hunger for something, because it feels lacking, it will yearn; this fashions an inner container in the soul to receive. With this kind of container, a person becomes a container through the lacking that he felt. If not for what he lacked, he wouldn’t have yearned to fill the emptiness. So it his lacking which enabled him to become a container.

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<sup>186</sup> Bava Kamma 92a



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But there is an even deeper kind of yearning in the soul which one can have, and it is also helps form an inner container: the yearning in the soul for shleimus, spiritual perfection. The Mesillas Yesharim refers to “shleimei hada'as”, those who yearn for spiritual perfection.

The yearning for shleimus is not the same thing as yearning for fulfillment. When one has a desire for shleimus, this is not simply a desire to fill one's inner emptiness. It stems from the light of the *Ein Sof* (the Infinite Light of Hashem), which was in its full zenith before Hashem made the space in Creation to form the universe.

When one longs to fill his inner emptiness, this comes from the chalal, the empty space, in the soul. Hashem first made the chalal in Creation in order to make space for Creation, and in terms of our soul, whenever we yearn for something, it stems from this emptiness that we feel. However, there is a deeper kind of yearning in our soul: the yearning for shleimus, that Hashem's Presence become revealed in the soul. Hashem is present deep in the soul, and thus there is a yearning to fully reveal His Presence in the soul – that is the yearning for shleimus. The longing for this shleimus does not stem from a lack of anything, and it is not about a yearning to fill any emptiness. Rather, it is a yearning to return to the original situation of Creation before there was a chalal.

This is a very subtle point about the soul.

### *The Deepest Yearning*

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When the Shechinah (Hashem's Presence) dwells, that is the most perfect situation that can be. The Aron (the Holy Ark) in the Beis HaMikdash is what contained the Shechinah, and inside the Aron were the Luchos, the Torah. The Torah is called Toras Hashem Temimah, “The Torah of Hashem is perfect”; the Torah is also called the *kli umniso shel HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, the “tools of craftsmanship” of Hashem.

This is what describes the yearning for shleimus. The yearning for shleimus does not stem from a wish to fill what one is lacking; it is the normal kind of yearning. It is a different kind of “container” in the person: the *kli umnuso shel HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, the “tools of Hashem”.

### *In Conclusion*

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To summarize, there are three opportunities which can help a person form an inner container in the soul: fire (opposition), wind (different situations), and water (changes). The root of forming an inner container is through earth, which is when one is hungry to fulfill his spiritual emptiness, and thus he has a longing to form the inner container. The deep kind of inner container, however, if formed through the longing for shleimus.

**013 | Modesty In-Depth<sup>187</sup>*****Modesty Comes From The Element Of Earth In Us***

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In the previous chapter, we discussed how our element of earth can be used as a power to receive things. When we develop our element of earth, it becomes a container for what we want to put into it.

There is another aspect contained in this. Besides for the fact that earth is a container to hold things, it also serves to cover something. To illustrate, an eggshell holds the yolk inside it, and at the same time, it also serves to cover it.

Earth serves to cover something. When the parts of the Mishkan had to be carried, they had to be covered.

Our clothing is sometimes referred to by *Chazal* as a *kli*, a “container.”<sup>188</sup> This also shows us the relationship between a container and a covering. When something contains something, it also covers it. Our clothing covers us, and it serves to cover us for two purposes: to keep us modest, and to keep us dignified.

The earth’s ability to “cover” something manifests in our soul in the trait of modesty – *tzniyus*. Modesty serves as a covering; it comes to hide and conceal something, just like the earth which acts as a covering.

***The Roots Of Modesty In The Torah***

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We will reflect into the very first roots in which we find modesty in the Torah.

There is a well-known Midrash<sup>189</sup> that as Hashem was creating Chavah, He created her from a rib, which is a place on the body that is more to the side and more out of sight. “For every part of her body that He created her with He said to her: Be a modest woman, be a modest woman.” We know that it didn’t end up this way, as *Chazal* conclude, but the point of *Chazal* is that the structure of a woman is modesty. “The entire glory of a daughter of the king is inside.”

We find modesty epitomized by Rochel Imeinu, who was praised by *Chazal* for her modesty: “Rochel was supposed to merit giving birth to the first-born...but because Leah prayed fervently and Hashem had mercy on her, she merited this instead; but because of her modesty, Hashem returned this to her<sup>190</sup>.” This was fulfilled when the rights to the first-born were taken away from Reuven, Leah’s son, and instead given to Yosef, Rochel’s son.

Shaul HaMelech, who descended from Rochel (through her other son Binyamin) also epitomized modesty; when Dovid HaMelech was able to kill him when he found him sleeping in a cave, he chose not to kill him because he

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<sup>187</sup> This chapter is adapted from *sefer Da Es Middosecha, Vol. I, chap. 13*. It was put in the end of this book due to its high level content.

<sup>188</sup> *Taanis 26b*

<sup>189</sup> *Beraishis Rabbah 18:2*

<sup>190</sup> *Bava Basra 123a*

saw how righteous Shaul was. What did he see in him? He saw that when Shaul had to relieve himself, he did so very discreetly and modestly. Because of his modesty, he merited to be saved from getting killed<sup>191</sup>.

*Chazal* also say that because of Shaul's great modesty, he merited that Queen Esther came from him.

Throughout *Chazal*, we can see that the middah of modesty is attributed mainly to women. The *Gemara* also says that a woman does not consent to be married to any man unless she first makes herself into a "receptacle" for him<sup>192</sup>; a receptacle is something which contains something and hides it. This again reflects the ability of a Jewish woman to be a "container", to "hide" something.

This is the introduction to our words here – the roots of modesty in the Jewish people.

### *How The Elements Cover and Conceal Things*

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Modesty makes us covered. Of the four elements, earth is the main element which serves to cover things. Fire is naturally bright. Water is naturally clear. Wind, when it is clean, is transparent. Earth, however, is dark. It is the darkest of all the elements, and therefore it is the epitome of a covering.

Of course, we can find sometimes that the other three elements also can cover things. This is because as we mentioned in the first chapter, each of the four elements contains some of the other four, and therefore you can find natures of each of the elements throughout any of the elements. However, a nature is particularly manifest in one of the elements; in our case, the main element which serves to cover things is earth, even though you can also find sometimes that the other elements can cover.

For example, fire is sometimes light, and sometimes it is bright red. Sometimes it is murkier. The Ramban says that the first fire in Creation was a totally black fire, and therefore, fire can also darken something and conceal it.

Wind, although it is usually transparent, can sometimes become dirty from the dust that it picks up. The dust swirls around with the wind and can cover things, so we find that wind can also cover sometimes.

Water is usually clear, so clear that it shows you your own reflection when you look into it. But when water is dirty, it shows you back a murky reflection which isn't clear. So we can find that water also sometimes can conceal things. Even more so, an unclad person standing in dirty water is allowed to daven, because the dirty water acts a separation between the lower section of his body and the higher section of his body. If the water is clear, the halacha is that he is not allowed to pray, because then the water isn't separating his lower section of his body from his higher section. So water, when it is dirty, can cover and conceal something.

Although we have just seen how the other three elements can cover things, earth is the main element which serves to cover.

The power to "cover" things is evil when it serves to conceal and hide something when it is not supposed to be concealed. Although the elements can cover things, they can also uncover things, so they can be used to get rid of an unwanted covering. Fire illuminates something and thus reveals it more. Water is clear and can reveal what's underneath its surface. Wind can blow away a covering off something.

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<sup>191</sup> *Berachos 62b*

<sup>192</sup> *Sanhedrin 22b*

To illustrate, when a person dies, his body is buried in the ground. The earth covers him. But eventually, he rises out of the earth, when the dead are resurrected in the future. What takes him out of the earth which conceals him? Hashem blows into him a ruach chaim, a spirit of life, which is a kind of wind.

We have seen thus far how fire, water and wind can remove coverings. How does earth remove something from being covered? When a seed is planted in the ground, it is first hidden and concealed. Then it sprouts into a plant, which comes out of the earth. So we find that earth, while being the main element that conceals, can use itself as well to reveal something that used to be hidden. Earth has the power to nourish and grow things – it brings something out of concealment and reveals out into the open.

We have described the general outline of the concept. Earth is the main element which conceals things, and the other three elements can be used to reveal it from its hidden state. We have also seen how the other three elements can be used as well to conceal, and how all four elements can all reveal.

As we have explained in the first chapter, every nature can be used for either good or evil. There is no such thing as a middah that is evil in its essence or only good in its essence, because anything can go both ways. Every middah can be used for good or, chas v'shalom, for evil. What we described until now was how we can see that the concept of covering/modesty can become evil – when something is concealed and it really shouldn't be.

Now, with the help of Hashem, we will explain how we use the power of modesty/covering for holiness. We will begin with the basic levels of modesty and go deeper into the understanding of modesty, until we arrive at the very inner root of modesty, which is described by the possuk, “With modest ones comes wisdom.”<sup>193</sup>

Whatever we described until now was just the roots of this topic. Now we will attempt to expand upon these words and explore deeply into the concept of modesty.

### ***One Purpose of Covering: Shame***

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Earth, the element which serves to cover and conceal, has many ways of how it does this. One purpose that a covering serves is that it comes to cover something which is either bad, or something that one is ashamed of.

There is a halacha that if one relieves himself in an open field, he has to cover the waste<sup>194</sup>. *Chazal* also say that the modesty is mainly exercised when a person relieves himself with modesty in the lavatory<sup>195</sup>.

From all this we can see that we cover something which is embarrassing or something bad that we are ashamed of. The fact that something has to be covered shows that there is something embarrassing here which deserves to get covered. This is why modesty mainly manifests itself in the lavatory, because it is then that we want to conceal something that's either bad or embarrassing.

Another halacha that has to do with “covering” is that a dead person must be covered in dirt when he is buried.

There is a depth to this. Really, death itself is a very great shame to a person. Whenever there is shame, we want to cover it up. There are many halachos that apply to honoring the dead, and it is specifically because since a dead

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<sup>193</sup> *Mishlei* 11:2

<sup>194</sup> *Devarim* 23:14

<sup>195</sup> *Berachos* 62a

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person lies before us in shame, we must honor him. The shame gets taken away when we finish burying him – the burial covers him over and hides the shame of his situation.

When a person is alive, he must cover the wastes which come from his body. If a person is killed by Beis Din, he must be buried, or else people will disgrace his body. On a deeper note, whenever a person dies, his whole body has to get covered in the ground, because the very fact that he is dead is a situation of shame, because death came onto the world as a result of Adam's sin. Thus, at death, we are reminded of the reason that brought about death to the world, which is sin - so we cover the body from the "shame" of death.

In addition to this, a person is supposed to keep his body covered in general. Before Adam and Chavah sinned, there was no shame in the world at being uncovered. The second they sinned, shame began. The sin produced the need to be covered – the need for modesty.

Most of a person's body has to be covered, but the main part of the body which must be covered are the private parts. The first time we see such a concept in the Torah is by Noach's children, who ran to go cover their father's nakedness when he was exposed.

All of these coverings we mentioned until now have to do with covering something bad or shameful. Clothing serves this purpose – it covers our shame, and mainly the private parts, which are the epitome of shame if they are to be exposed.

### *Covering In Order To Give Honor*

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Sometimes we find how clothing can be for an altogether different purpose – to give honor. These were the bigdei kehunah (the priest's garments), of which it is written, "For glory and for beauty."

From bigdei kehunah we can begin to see that not only does clothing come to hide a person's disgrace, but it also comes to give honor.

### *The Higher Kind Of Modesty*

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Before, we brought the words of *Chazal* regarding Shaul's great modesty. The *Gemara* there states that when he had to relieve himself, he went behind a fence within a fence, and a cave with another cave, and that he was covered over by all directions, like a sukkah.

What's the difference between how a fence covers something and how a cave covers something? A fence can cover, but not totally; it's still open on the other side of the fence. It's only enough to protect what you want to hide from an onlooker. But a cave is a total enclosure; it covers all the angles. His modesty in the cave was a whole different kind of modesty than in the fence.

These are two different kinds of modesty: one kind of modesty serves to cover something shameful, which is the basic level of modesty. There is another kind of modesty, though, that serves an altogether different purpose – it is for a person to become connected to the very concept of modesty.

The modesty that one must have in the lavatory is the epitome of the first kind of modesty, which is to hide something shameful. But there is another kind of modesty which is a more inner kind of modesty than this. It is the

modesty which we find by Rochel Imeinu and Shaul Hamelech. This higher kind of modesty was precisely the kind of modesty that saved Shaul from death.

The lower kind of modesty, to cover over something shameful, is how we rectify the first sin, which produced shame – and death. The higher kind of modesty doesn't come to cover over shame, but it comes instead to reveal the reason for *chiyus* (life) in something. We will explain this deeper modesty.

We have thus seen that there are two different levels of modesty. One kind of modesty is to conceal something bad; if the bad wouldn't be in the equation, there would be no need for the modesty, because the modesty is only a means to a certain end. This is the modesty one has to have in the lavatory; had Adam not sinned, there would be no need for such modesty.

The second kind of modesty, which is the higher kind of modesty, comes to reveal the life behind something. It is written, "With modest ones there is wisdom." This is a kind of modesty that existed even before Adam's sin – it is the root of the life-sustaining energy in something.

We will try to understand what this deep modesty is.

### ***How Modesty Relates To Our Connection To Hashem***

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This higher kind of modesty is rooted in a very hidden source.

In words that are quite simple: What Hashem does can be seen by all, but His actual existence is not revealed to us – even though we can know with certainty that He does exist. No one is more modest than Hashem, who has never revealed Himself yet -- and never will reveal Himself. He is somewhat revealed to us through the actions He does, but His actual existence is still very concealed from us. "For no man can see me and live."

The *sefer* Leshem writes that Hashem is the "hidden truth." Hashem is the ultimate reality which there is, but this reality is very hidden from us; this is not by chance – it is on purpose.

In our soul, modesty is exemplified mainly through our connection to the reality of Hashem's existence. When we are connected to Him, we are connected to what is called modesty.

Modesty is the way to connect to the Creator. If someone doesn't have it, he does not have the means to be able to connect to Him. Hashem is very hidden from us, and the only tool we can have to reach Him is through modesty. When a person is modest, he/she is connected to a power that exists called modesty, and from that a person can connect himself to the Creator, who is epitome of modesty.

### ***Modesty Is Found On The Inside Of Something***

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The possuk says, "Walk modestly with Your G-d." *Chazal* say that this is referring to a wedding and a funeral, that these events should be conducted with modesty. *Chazal* also say that if these things which are normally done

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openly need to be done modestly, surely things which are modest matters to begin with need to be done with modesty<sup>196</sup>.

The depth of this statement is a deep point. Usually, the beginning and end of something is very revealed for all to see. A wedding, which is the beginning of a home, is watched by everybody. The end of a person's life, which is a funeral, is also attended by everybody. The beginning and the end of a person's life is always revealed – everyone knows when a baby is born, and people all hear about someone's death. Which part of a person's life remains hidden? The middle of his life – in other words, his entire lifetime, which is in between birth and death. This shows us that the “middle point” is always hidden. Soon, we will learn the implication of what this means.

The middle is always the hidden part. When you look at something, you only see the edges – where it begins and where it ends. But you don't see the middle.

For example, when you look at a new book in the store, you flip through the pages quickly from beginning until end – but you don't read the middle. A person attempts to understand the content of something based on seeing its beginning and end, but the middle is always hidden.

Modesty is associated throughout *Chazal* with women. A woman was created from the rib, which is a part on the body that is on the side. This was specifically to show that just like Hashem commanded a woman to be modest with a part of her body that is more easily seen, like a rib which is at an end, surely she should be modest with the other parts of her body that are more hidden than her rib.

Corners and ends can be seen, while the middle is not. In terms of our soul, the question is: are we holding onto the corners of something, or are we holding onto what's inside it? What we are really getting at is that usually, people live their lives superficially and only see the “edges” of something, but they never get to the content inside it.

Modesty comes from our element of earth, as we said before. Another thing you can notice about earth in relation to the other three elements is that earth is the only thing you can hold with your hands. Fire and wind definitely cannot be held in your hand, and water usually slips out between your fingers.

Earth, which we can hold, is the only element which you can hold, and it is only able to be held by its edges. When you hold a clump of dirt in your hand, you're not holding the inside of it; you're grasping it by its edges.

We are not trying to have a scientific discussion here. What we are interested in knowing is that everything we know about the elements can apply to our soul. In terms of our soul, we usually only understand the “edges” of something, and not the “content” inside.

What's the difference if you hold something from its edges or if you're holding it from its middle? When you're holding the edges, you're holding its boundaries – its limits. But when you hold something from the middle, you're holding onto a place from which spreads out the rest of what you're holding.

The Torah is “longer than the earth and wider than the sea.” When a person learns Torah, he's only holding onto its words and letters; he's not holding onto what's underneath that, which is its real vastness. This is because we are in the world which is after the sin, and our perception is limited.

The point of what we are saying here is that we are trying to describe an inner world that exists, in which we can hold onto the content inside something. The world which we see and recognize today is the world that came after the sin of Adam, in which our grasp and perception is limited; all we can know of are the “edges” of something; that

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<sup>196</sup> *Sukkah 49b*

is, if we only remain in this state of post-sin. But we can access the kind of state which existed before the sin, in which we are able to really grasp the content of something. This state exists in the deepest part of our soul.<sup>197</sup>

### Modesty In Time, In The World, and In Our Soul

Before we said that there is a lower kind of modesty, which serves a purpose to cover up something bad, and that we fix whatever's bad through covering it; and that there is a higher kind of modesty, in which we are covering something that is supposed to remain hidden. This inner, hidden point is so modest that we have a hard time understanding what it is, precisely because it is so modest.

Shabbos is called “a gift which I have in My treasury.” This point is very hidden deep within our soul. It exists, but it is hidden. It is hidden from even the person himself; but if a person has reached true modesty, he can know of it – “And the wise ones have wisdom.” Modesty is associated with chochmah, wisdom. What does this possuk mean? Do only modest people have wisdom?! Many people aren't modest yet they are wise; what then does it mean?

But really, only with modesty can a person really have wisdom. This is because someone who isn't modest only knows of something based on seeing its superficial layer – its edges. One who is modest grasps information from its center and thus truly knows what it is.

There is a concept in *Chazal* called “Olam (world), Shanah (year/time), Nefesh (soul)”. This concept says that everything as we know it takes place on three planes – in a place somewhere in the world, in a certain time, and in our own soul.

In time, modesty is found in Shabbos. On Shabbos we mainly stay indoors, and we cannot carry from one private domain to another private domain. We can carry inside our own house, but to carry outside is prohibited. This reflects privacy and modesty; Shabbos is a time of modesty.

The Kodesh Hakadashim, the holiest room in the Beis HaMikdash, was a place in the world where there is modesty. There, only the Kohen Gadol was allowed to enter -- alone, and only once a year. It was ultimately private and modest.

In our soul, the Nefesh HaChaim writes that there is also a personal Kodesh Kodashim within ourselves. This is in our heart, which knows of things that aren't always verbalized by our mouth. Our heart serves as the source of modesty in our soul.

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### ***Modesty and Being Alone***

Many times we find modesty associated with being alone. We find this both by the lower and higher kinds of modesty – it is all about being alone.

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*197 Many times, the author in his sefarim states that although we know that we are after the sin of Adam and living in the altered state of Creation, and that the future Redemption will return us to the perfected state of before the sin, there is still a deep part in our soul which was unaffected by the sin, and if we access our deepest point of our soul, we are able to access (somewhat, and to a certain degree) the perfected state that existed before the sin of Adam, in which everything is the way it should be. Grasping the “content” of a matter is just one example of this concept, but there are many other applications, beyond the scope of this work. The concept of being able to return somewhat to the state before the sin of Adam, even in our lifetime, is found in sefer Adir B'Marom of the Ramchal (an esoteric work by the author of Mesillas Yesharim).*



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The lower kind of modesty, like when a person acts modestly in the lavatory, epitomizes modesty, because the person is all alone.

In the higher modesty, the Kohen Gadol in the Kodshei Kodashim was all alone. Being “alone” is associated with holiness; Yaakov fought “alone”, and Hashem is also called “alone.” The inner core of everything is really to be “alone”, and being “alone”<sup>198</sup> is really the depth of modesty.

But there seems to be a contradiction. On one hand, being “alone” is the root of modesty, yet in a marriage, a man and a woman come together and they are not alone. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Doesn’t this contradict the idea of modesty, which is to be “alone”?

But actually, nothing could be more modest. Modesty is mainly reached during the holy act of marital intimacy between a husband and a wife, which is supposed to be done with modesty. “They shall become one flesh.” If they don’t act modestly, then they aren’t “one” – they are two separate people. But if they do conduct themselves with modesty, they are “one flesh” – in other words, they reveal the “alone” of Hashem there.<sup>199</sup>

It is precisely the marital union which the Torah says that it’s possible to become one, and it is precisely the marital union in which we find a requirement of modesty. This is not by chance; it is during this act that an inner reality can be revealed, a reality of “alone” that brings out the depth of modesty. However, if they aren’t intending to become more unified through the act, they just remain as two separate entities, and then there is no modesty in the act, because they aren’t trying to reveal any oneness through the act.

### ***The Depth Behind Covering The Head***

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Getting back to how this all relates to our soul, so far we have brought many scenarios in which we find modesty: covering waste, covering the dead, and wearing clothing in general.

There is an even higher modesty which we find, and this is the halacha to cover one’s head: “You must cover your head so that you will have fear of Heaven<sup>200</sup>.”

With this covering, we aren’t covering something because of something bad or shameful. Here, we are covering what is above our head – in other words, there is a point that is above our comprehension, and there we can reveal the oneness of Hashem, through covering the head.

Covering the head reflects what is written, “With modest ones, there is wisdom.” A person’s wisdom is nursed from his/her modesty. “Wisdom is found in ayin (nothingness)”. When one makes himself into ayin, nothing – he nullifies his self, and he reveals the hidden reality within him.

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*198 In Getting To Know Your Self, the author explained how to use the power of “Alone” (levad) in the soul.*

*199 See Shulchan Aruch: Even HaEzer: 25 and Orach Chaim:240 for the laws of modesty during marital intimacy. One should consult his Rav or Halachic authority about these matters to see which of these halachos are obligation or stringency, as these halachos often depend on the situation of the couple, and much sensitivity of each spouse is taken into consideration before deciding how exactly they should go about sanctifying themselves.*

*200 Shabbos 155b*

Someone who doesn't nullify himself only looks to give himself honor and reveal himself more to others. By contrast, one who nullifies himself keeps himself more hidden from others. This is really the depth behind why we cover our head.

### *Modesty In Our Soul*

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We learned that there are two kinds of modesty: being modest from other people, which is the lower kind of modesty (which we find by the first level of Shaul Hamelech's modesty, who relieved himself behind a fence within a fence), and the higher kind of modesty that is hidden deep inside a person (which is the second level in Shaul's modesty, that he also went behind a cave within a cave).

The point of modesty is not just to be hidden from others. It is to be a paradigm of modesty as it is written in Tehillim, "In the shadow of His wings, take shelter." We also find modesty reflected by the concept of sukkah, which means "a covering"; a sukkah is covered by all directions. Being covered by all directions shows that there is more to being covered from the eyesight of people; it is to be covered for a deeper purpose.

The depth behind being covered is not just so that one is hidden from others; that is only the lower kind of modesty, which came as a result of the first sin. For this it would be enough to be covered enough so that others can't see what should be hidden. The depth of modesty comes from a point within us that is entirely void and nullified of our self.

What, exactly, are we describing?

It is brought from the Baal Shem Tov that a person should picture himself always being surrounded by Hashem's light. In this way, a person is always modest and hidden within something; he is constantly enveloped. It is like a sukkah, which completely covers a person for the entire time.

This is also the deep reason why a person is taught the entire Torah inside his mother before he is born. There, a person is in total modesty. It is there that a person nurses his learning of the holy Torah.

There is a deep place in a person's soul in which he is constantly covered and hidden. It is precisely there where the holy Torah is revealed to a person. For this reason, one of the Sages did not want to teach Torah to his student out in the open, and only in the Beis Midrash, because the Torah thrives only where it can be hidden<sup>201</sup>.

When a person lives the inner part of his soul, his modesty is complete. He is covered by all directions and he stands in the middle point, and it is there that he can really understand things, because the real way to perceive something is when you grasp it from the inside of it. The middle point, the content behind something, is really endless, unlike the edges which come to an end.

This is the depth behind why one of the Sages said that the world was created from the middle, and not from its edges<sup>202</sup>, because the middle spreads out endlessly, while the edges have an end point somewhere.

This is the depth behind modesty in our soul, and it is from this power in our soul that a person is able to connect totally to the Creator -- Who is endless.

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<sup>201</sup> Midrash Tanchuma, Bechukosai 4

<sup>202</sup> Yuma 55b



## 014 | *Forgetfulness*

### *What Do We Forget, and What Do We Remember?*

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In the previous chapter, which dealt with the trait of modesty in the soul, we mentioned the words of the Sages that modesty is mainly exemplified when relieving oneself in the lavatory. The above statement of the Sages continues: “Who is a modest one? One who relieves himself at nighttime, instead of relieving himself by daytime.”<sup>203</sup>

It is dark at night, so it would seem that there is no need for modesty at night, because one cannot be seen then anyway. Yet, the Sages revealed that nighttime is precisely the time in which we are meant to reveal modesty.

During the day, there is light, and at night, it is dark. This manifests in our soul as follows.

There is “darkness” in the soul, and this is what produces the trait of shikc’hah, forgetfulness. The Hebrew word for “darkness” is c’hoshech, which has the same letters as the Hebrew word shoc’hac’h, to forget. So there is a connection between darkness and forgetfulness. What is the connection? When something is revealed out in the open, we don’t forget it; we remember it. When a person is consciously aware of something, it is revealed to his mind, and he remembers it. But when something is hidden and concealed from us, it is apt to be forgotten.

This is our nature: when something is revealed to us and in front of our eyes, we remember it. This is the deeper meaning behind “Shivisi Hashem L’Negdi Tamid”, “I place Hashem before me always” – because Hashem is always in front of us, we are commanded to always remember Him. We can remember Him precisely because He is in front of us. But when something is not in front of us, we are able to forget it.

Thus, when something is concealed from us, it can be forgotten. If something is revealed to us, we don’t forget it.

So the trait of forgetfulness is created from “darkness” in the soul: when something is concealed from us, it is forgotten, just as the darkness conceals things from our sight.

### *How Forgetfulness Is Rooted In Earth*

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From all of the elements, earth is the darkest element, and it produces darkness inside the soul. For this reason, the trait of forgetfulness, which comes from darkness in the soul, is rooted in the element of earth.

Forgetfulness is termed by our Sages as reminiscent of death. The Sages said that had the first set of Luchos (Tablets) never been broken, the Torah would never have been forgotten from the Jewish people.<sup>204</sup> Forgetfulness first appears in the world with this episode – the breaking of the first set of Luchos.

The sin of the Golden Calf was like the sin of Adam happening all over again. At Har Sinai, all of the Jewish people returned to the level of Adam before the sin, and with the sin of the Golden Calf, we were once again cursed

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<sup>203</sup> Berachos 62a

<sup>204</sup> Erwin 54a

with death, just as Adam was cursed with death after the sin. The breaking of the Luchos, which happened as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf, is what enabled us to ever forget our Torah learning; thus, forgetfulness and death are connected concepts.

The first set of Luchos rectified our ruined element of earth (a result of the sin of Adam), and had the Luchos not been broken, there would be no such thing as forgetting the Torah. Once the Luchos were broken, we returned to our fallen element of earth – the curse of death, along with the possibility to forget Torah.

We also find that the dead are forgotten after some time; Hashem decreed this is a law of our nature, that the dead are eventually forgotten from our hearts.<sup>205</sup> The deeper meaning behind this is that when the body returns to the earth, it is able to be forgotten.

If a Torah scholar forgets his learning when he gets old, the Sages warn that one should still be careful to honor him, for he is like the broken Luchos, which still retain their sanctity<sup>206</sup>. The simple reason for this is because even though right now he doesn't know the Torah, the Torah used to be in him, so he should still be honored, because he used to learn Torah. But the deeper meaning of this is that the broken Luchos are the source of forgetting one's Torah learning; had the Luchos not been broken, a Torah scholar would never forget his learning. He wouldn't get old and lose his memory, because there would be no such as death; and he would never be able to forget at all. The entire reason why there is forgetfulness in the world is due to the breaking of the first Luchos.

The curse of death, which came along with the possibility to forget, made man return to the earth he came from, for the curse of death is described as "To earth you shall return." Therefore, when one returns to his element of earth, he is able to forget; if one leaves his element of earth, he leaves the possibility of forgetfulness.

The Maharal wrote that our ability to remember comes from our spiritual source, while our ability to forget comes from our materialistic aspects. This further brings out how forgetfulness is rooted in our element of earth.

### ***Forgetfulness Caused By Fire, Water and Wind***

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As we explained in previous chapters, a problem stemming from the element of earth can also be stemming from any of the other three elements (fire, water and wind) that are also present in the earth. Therefore, we can find how fire, water and wind can be involved in causing forgetfulness. However, since forgetfulness is mainly rooted in the element of earth, it is mainly the element of earth that is responsible for forgetfulness.

Fire causes forgetfulness as follows. The Sages said that "Whoever gets angry, he forgets his Torah study."<sup>207</sup> Additionally, they said that "One who is conceited, forgets his Torah study."<sup>208</sup> We have already mentioned earlier that both the traits of anger and conceit are rooted in the element of fire. Conceit stems from the heat in fire, and anger stems from the dryness in fire.

Forgetfulness is really caused by the element of earth, so what does it mean that conceit and anger can cause one to forget his Torah learning? It means that conceit and anger can bring out the element of earth in the person, and once the element of earth is activated, forgetfulness can ensue. The dryness of fire, which is the root of the trait of

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<sup>205</sup> *Pesachim 54b*

<sup>206</sup> *Berachos 8b*

<sup>207</sup> *Nedarim 22b*

<sup>208</sup> *Yevamos 105b*

anger, returns a person to the dryness of his earth element. And when a person is conceited, he is also returned to his element of earth, because “Hashem lowers the conceited.”

Where do we find that wind can cause forgetfulness? When the Tower of Babel was being built, Hashem confused their languages. It would seem simply that Hashem made them forget their languages so they were each speaking different languages to each other, but the *Gemara* states that the forgetfulness was because the air on the tower caused them to be forgetful.<sup>209</sup> In other words, the air, which is the element of wind, is what made them forgetful.

But although the element of wind was a factor here, it was still the element of earth which mainly caused them to be forgetful. They stacked up many bricks in order to build the tower, and from this giant pile of “earth” they came to the elevated heights of the tower in which the air made them forgetful. So it was really the earth which brought them to this situation of forgetfulness. The air by itself, without the tower made by the earth, would not have been enough to make them forgetful.

Where do we find that water can cause forgetfulness? The Sages say that one of the things which causes forgetfulness is when a person drinks bathwater.<sup>210</sup> Again, it is not only the water here which is causing the forgetfulness – it is the earth. The person is dirty with dust of the earth on his body, so he needs water to wash it off. Drinking such water causes one to be forgetful; but it is only because such water was involved in removing the earth upon his body.

We have seen how fire, wind and water can all be factors in breeding forgetfulness, yet it is always the element of earth which allows it to happen.

### ***Fixing Forgetfulness***

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Forgetfulness can be removed using the elements of fire, wind or water. We will also see how even earth can be used as a subtle way to fix trait forgetfulness for which it is mainly responsible for.

### ***How Fire Can Remove Forgetfulness***

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It is obvious how the element of fire can be used to remove forgetfulness.

Forgetfulness, as we explained, is rooted in darkness in the soul that stems from the element of earth. When something is in front of our eyes, it is not forgotten, and when something is concealed from us, it is apt to be forgotten. Thus, the element of fire is the antithesis to darkness in the soul, because fire illuminates darkness and thus it removes forgetfulness.

### ***How Wind Can Remove Forgetfulness***

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Wind can fix forgetfulness as follows.

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<sup>209</sup> *Sanhedrin 109a*

<sup>210</sup> *Horayos 13b*

The *Gemara* says that one should verbalize the words of Torah he is learning, and then he will remember it better.<sup>211</sup> When a person verbalizes his learning, he is using the power of speech, which is rooted in the element of wind, because speech is called ruach memalehah (“a talking spirit”), related to ruach/wind. When one speaks the words of Torah he is learning, he takes the words of Torah and brings them out of their dormant state into their active potential.

When earth remains dormant, its potential is left unutilized. It remains concealed, thus it breeds forgetfulness. When one verbalizes his learning, he has brought the words of Torah into their active state, and thus he remembers the words.

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## ***How Water Can Fix Forgetfulness***

How can the element of water be used to fix forgetfulness?

The *Gemara*<sup>212</sup> say that one should review his learning, even if he forgets them and even if he doesn't know what he is saying, for it is written, “My soul will review, for it is hungry.” The simple understanding of this *Gemara* is based on the words of the Zohar and the Arizal, that a person will be reminded all of his Torah learning in Heaven after he dies; for this reason, a person should learn Torah even if he will forget. But the deeper understanding of this *Gemara* is that when a person learns Torah out of a desire for the words, he will remember it better. Desire is rooted in the element of water, so we see that the element of water can help a person remember his learning.

We have mentioned thus far three ways in how to rectify the trait of forgetfulness that is rooted in the element of earth.

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## ***Examining The Root of Forgetfulness***

Here is another statement of our Sages about forgetfulness. “A fetus in its mother's womb is taught the entire Torah, and once it enters the air of this world, an angel comes and strikes his mouth, and causes him to forget the entire Torah.”<sup>213</sup>

Let us reflect into what this means. What is this “angel” that strikes a baby and causes him to forget all the Torah he was taught? It is brought in the writings of the Arizal, and in other sources as well, that the angel appointed over forgetfulness is called “the Samech Mem”<sup>214</sup>. The Hebrew letters samech and mem are 60 and 40, which add up to be 100. There is another statement of our Sages, “One who reviews his learning 100 times is not as prominent as one who reviews his learning 101 times”.<sup>215</sup> The number 100 is the value of the word Michael - the angel appointed memory, for “To my right, Michael.”

Soon, we will delve more into this. We can also ask: Once the baby enters the air of this world, he forgets all the learning he was taught. Why is the emphasis here on the “air” of the world, and not simply on the fact that he enters

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<sup>211</sup> *Erwin 54a*

<sup>212</sup> *Avodah Zarah 19a*

<sup>213</sup> *Niddah 30b*

<sup>214</sup> Also known as “Samael”, usually connected with the “Sitra Achara”, “The Other Side” [the forces of evil and impurity].

<sup>215</sup> *Chagigah 9b*

the world? The answer is based upon the concept brought earlier, that the air on the Tower of Babel is what caused them to become forgetful. We see from this that the air of this world – in and of itself - is a cause for forgetfulness.

What is the depth behind this?

The *Gemara* reveals that when the Luchos were given, the letters mem and samech in the Luchos were floating in the air, through a miracle<sup>216</sup>. All of the letters carved onto the Luchos were not hollow, so the Luchos were able to hold them, whereas the letters mem and samech have holes in between them, so there was nothing to connect them in place. The fact that these letters did not fall out was a miracle. That is the simple meaning of this *Gemara*. The deeper meaning, though, is that the stone of the Luchos was made of the element of earth, and since Hashem Himself had hewn these Luchos, it was the perfected kind of earth.

The facts that the letters mem and samech remained standing in the Luchos, and the fact that mem and samech are the letters in the name of the angel which causes forgetfulness (The “Samech Mem”), are one related subject. When the Luchos were broken, the letters mem and samech which had stood through a miracle are now the very letters which cause forgetfulness [when combined]!

Before the Luchos were broken, when the letters mem and samech stood through a miracle, these letters were actually able to provide memory [of one’s Torah learning], for they were the handiwork of Hashem, and not the work of a human. The letters mem and samech were on their own, detached from the Luchos, whereas the other letters on the Luchos were craved into the stones, attached to the element of earth. Thus, the original set of Luchos, before they were broken, contained a level of Torah that could not ever be forgotten, because they were a perfected kind of earth. The letters samech and mem were in the air, thus they were part of the element of wind, and not earth; whereas the other letters were part of the element of earth, a perfected kind of earth [for they were hewn by Hashem Himself].

When the Luchos were broken, the letters mem and samech remained afloat in the air, but instead of a miracle sustaining them, they were simply drifting in the air. Ever since they were broken, when the element of earth has become impaired, the angel appointed over forgetfulness fights not only the element of earth, but even the element of wind it wages war against.

Thus, there are two sources for evil forgetfulness. One source is the impaired element of earth, which came onto the scene after the Luchos were broken. An additional source of evil forgetfulness is the “air” of this world – “once a fetus enters the air of this world, an angel strikes him and causes him to forget all his Torah learning.”

As long as a fetus is inside the mother, an angel teaches him the entire Torah. There, the Torah is not transmitted to him in writing, but orally. When a baby enters the world, he enters the place in which things have to be written down in order to be remembered. This is the forgetfulness that the “air” of this world causes.

Thus, just as earth is the root of forgetfulness, so is the “air” of this earth an additional cause of forgetfulness.

To illustrate how air is related to earth, we find a halacha in the laws of Shabbos that if one throws something over the ground, even if it never touched the ground, it is considered as if he has carried from domain to domain, even though the object did not stop in a public domain. The airspace of the ground has the status of the ground, to make him liable of the melachah (forbidden labor) of carrying on Shabbos. From here we see that air above the ground is like a part of the earth underneath it.

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<sup>216</sup> *Megillah 3a*



Applying this to the current discussion, after the sin with the Golden Calf and the Luchos were broken, forgetfulness not only stems from earth, but it can stem from the air in earth as well. We can see this from physical earth and wind, when they meet. Wind blows on the earth and causes the dust to swirl into the air, and then the wind becomes blackened.

This is the meaning behind how “The air on the tower of Babel caused forgetfulness.” The lesson of it was that not only does earth cause forgetfulness, but that air as well causes forgetfulness; and we see this from the fact that when a baby enters the world, the “air” of this world causes him to forget all his learning.

So there are two sources of forgetfulness: when it comes from earth, and from the air of the earth. The second source, air of the earth, represents the total level of forgetfulness [because it was a concept that was introduced as a result of sin].

The more subtle understanding of this is that earth and wind are opposites, and there is a rule that “opposites always bear the same root”; thus, if forgetfulness is rooted in earth, it must be rooted in wind as well.

### *The Depth of Forgetting One’s Torah Learning*

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The two kinds of forgetfulness that exist are parallel to the two kinds of forgetfulness which we deal with: the general trait of forgetfulness that exists in all of Creation, which is when we simply forget something; and forgetting our Torah learning.

The Torah warns us explicitly: “Guard it very carefully, lest you forget these words.” The *Gemara* learns from here that it is a sin to forget one’s Torah learning.<sup>217</sup> There is a difference between the regular kind of forgetting and the forgetting of one’s Torah learning. The regular kind of forgetting is rooted in our element of earth, but forgetting one’s Torah learning is rooted in the element of wind.

It seems simply that there is no difference between regular forgetting and forgetting one’s learning, and that it’s the same habit to forget. When a person forgets how much money in his bank account, isn’t it the same kind of forgetfulness which makes him forget his Torah learning?

But the truth is, that forgetting one’s learning has nothing to do with the regular bad habit of being forgetful that we are familiar with. It comes from a different source in the soul. Regular forgetting comes from earth, while forgetting one’s Torah learning comes from the area of wind in the soul.

The Torah is called a “wind”, for it is called the “ruach” (spirit) of Hashem, and ruach is wind. We are also commanded to speak words of Torah, and speech is rooted in wind. Thus, we are specially commanded not to forget the words of Torah.

Of Amalek, we are commanded to remember what they did to us, and in addition, we are commanded not to forget what they did.<sup>218</sup> The Sages learned from this apparent redundancy that we must never forget in our hearts what they did to us, and we are commanded as well to verbalize what they did to us, and that is how we remember.<sup>219</sup> We can see from here as well the two kinds of forgetting: when there is forgetting rooted in earth

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<sup>217</sup> *Menachos* 99b

<sup>218</sup> *Devarim* 25: 17-19

<sup>219</sup> *Megillah* 18a

[when our heart forgets the episode of Amalek], and forgetting that is rooted in wind [when we don't verbalize the episode of Amalek].

### ***Total Forgetting Vs. Confusion***

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There is an opinion in the Sages<sup>220</sup> that the Torah will one day be forgotten from the Jewish people; Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai disagreed: "G-d forbid to say that the Torah will be forgotten from the Jewish people! It is written, "For it shall not be forgotten from His offspring." Although there was a prophecy that there will be Torah forgotten from the Jewish people, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai explained that the prophecy meant that the study of clear Mishnah and clear *Halacha* will not be concentrated together in any one place.

We see that our Sages disagreed as to what it means that the Torah will be forgotten from us. The Sages were of the opinion that people will simply forget the Torah, while Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said that it will not happen, only that there will be a lack of clarity.

The rule is that "Both of their words and their words are the words of the living G-d"<sup>221</sup>, so whenever our Sages disagree, both views are always correct. Let us try to understand both of the differing views and how they are both correct. What is the root of forgetting one's Torah learning, and what is the root of a lack of clarity toward one's Torah learning?

When a person simply forgets his Torah learning, this comes from any other kind of forgetting that we are familiar with. As the generations go on, the spiritual level of the generations decrease; this is the concept of *yeridas hadoros*, "descent of the generations." What are we further descending into? The element of earth. The Sages state that we will be lowered until the depths of the earth, and then we will eventually be redeemed. It is for this reason that the Sages were of the opinion that the Torah will be forgotten from the Jewish people; since we are further and further descending into the element of earth as the generations go on, and earth is the root of forgetfulness, there will be forgetfulness towards the Torah. That is one kind of forgetting.

But the other kind of forgetting, as we explained, stems from the element of wind. This is the kind of forgetfulness that Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai was referring to, that the Torah will not be simply forgotten, and that it will merely become unclear to people. Even in the later generations, in which we have become very entrenched into the element of earth, we find that people are still remembering the Torah; the words of Torah are being spoken from our lips, and that is a guarantee that we will remember it. It is just that there is confusion about the words of Torah. "The clear *Halacha* and the clear Mishnah will not be concentrated in any one place." This is referring specifically to the second kind of forgetfulness, to "forget" one's Torah learning – in the sense that one is not clear in his learning. This is the kind of forgetfulness rooted in the element of wind.

The basic kind of forgetting that we are familiar with is rooted in the element of earth. For example, Hashem decreed that "the dead are eventually forgotten from our hearts". It's possible that a person forgets his learning in the same way. A person can surely forget his learning, as we know. But what does a person forget when he forgets his learning? He forgets the external layer of the Torah. The inner essence of the Torah, the "ruach Hashem" (spirit of Hashem) which the Torah is called, is never able to be totally forgotten. The only kind of forgetfulness one can have with regards to the inner essence of the Torah is the lack of clarity in his learning.

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<sup>220</sup> *Shabbos 138b*

<sup>221</sup> *Gittin 6b*

Thus, forgetfulness stemming from earth is when a person simply forgets something, and forgetfulness stemming from wind is when a person is confused and unclear.

To illustrate, we have a mitzvah to remember the episode of Amalek. Nowadays, there is no mitzvah to erase Amalek, because ever since Sanheriv mixed around the countries of the world, we are not sure who is from Amalek.<sup>222</sup> The depth behind this is that the mixing up and confusing of the nations of the world is a subtle way of how we “forget” Amalek. There is nothing we can do about this, though, because it is all coming from a confusion, being that Amalek is not concentrated in any one place.

Wind, which causes movement, has the power to mix around things with its movements. This is a power that can be used either for evil or holiness. It is used for good when it mixes together things in order to harmonize them and connect them, and this is the concept of the Northern Wind, which we spoke about earlier<sup>223</sup>. It is used for evil when it mixes things around and causes confusion; when wind lifts the dust into the air, it becomes blackened, and this manifests in terms of our soul when we lack clarity in our learning.

We have explained how forgetfulness stemming from earth is a kind of forgetfulness that is total, and forgetfulness stemming from wind is when there is confusion and lack of clarity.

### ***Forgetfulness Rooted In Wind: When There Is A Removal of Da'as***

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The second kind of forgetting – forgetting one’s Torah learning, which stems from the area of wind in the soul – can be explained based upon the following *Gemara*: “The words of Torah are not forgotten unless there is hesech hada’as (a removal of one’s da’as/thoughts).<sup>224</sup> When a person takes his mind off something, he comes to forget it.

The simple understanding of this is that as soon as one has hesech hada’as [when he stops thinking about something holy], he forgets about spiritual matters and falls back onto his physicality, and his physicality is awakened, which does not allow for his Torah learning to be remembered. If this is the definition, though, then it is forgetfulness that stems from earth.

But there is another way to understand forgetting one’s learning, which comes from hesech hada’as. As long as a person retains his da’as (his real, thinking spiritual mind), he has order in his thoughts. Da’as creates order in one’s mind; when one loses his da’as, [when he takes his mind off holiness], confusion in his mind is created.

The Sages state that “Moshiach will come with hesech hada’as”. It is written of the redemption, “The voice of my beloved, behold, it is coming, skipping over the mountains, jumping over the hills.”<sup>225</sup> When there is holy hesech hada’as, the holy “jumping” will come – the jumping of Moshiach. But when the power of “jumping” is used for evil, like when there is a lack order in one’s mind and his mind is therefore jumpy, this is an evil kind of jumpiness, and it creates the evil trait that is forgetfulness.

How do we see that jumpiness/skipping is linked with forgetfulness? We see this from the mitzvah to give shikc’hah to the poor. Any forgotten sheaves of grain are entitled to the poor; when the owner skips over some of

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<sup>222</sup> Yoma 54a

<sup>223</sup> For more on the “Northern Wind” and how it manifests in the soul, see *Understanding Your Middos #07 (Internal Hardening) as well as* ער רוח צפונית – 079 המדות-רוח (English translation not yet available).

<sup>224</sup> Taanis 7b

<sup>225</sup> Shir HaShirim 2:8

the grains and leaves them behind, the remaining leaves become shikc'hah, and they must be given as a gift to the poor.

This is the kind of forgetfulness that stems from wind in the soul: a lack of order in the thoughts, which causes confusion in the thoughts, resulting in hesech *hada'as*. It is a removal of one's *da'as*.

### ***Rectifying Forgetfulness: Connecting To The Reality of the Creator***

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How can forgetfulness stemming from wind become fixed?

There are two approaches. The simple antidote for this is for one to return his *da'as*, which has become removed from him. The more a person increases his *da'as*, the more he chips away at his forgetfulness.

There is a deeper approach, though, based on a Midrash<sup>226</sup>, which states that since we received the Torah from Moshe Rabbeinu, who was a human being, we therefore forget the Torah, because it was given to us by a human. In the future, we will receive the Torah directly from the mouth of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and this will be a Torah that will never become forgotten.

Earlier, we explained based on the words of our Sages<sup>227</sup> that forgetfulness began with the breaking of the Luchos. But now we have seen from the words of our Sages the deeper root of forgetfulness: it is because our current Torah is the Torah we received from Moshe Rabbeinu, and since Moshe was human, it is possible to forget the current Torah.

The reason for this is because when we were first about to accept the Torah, there were members among us who did not wish to hear it from Hashem Himself, because they were afraid, so they asked that it be given by Moshe Rabbeinu instead. What was their mistake? What is wrong if they just wanted to hear it from Moshe? It was because they did not wish to hear the voice of Hashem, and that was why they turned away Hashem's voice in favor of Moshe's voice. This deviation on their part was already the root of forgetting the current Torah.

Thus, the root of forgetfulness did not begin with the breaking of the Luchos; it really began with the will of the people to hear the Torah from Moshe instead of wanting to hear it from Hashem.

What is the difference if we hear the Torah from Moshe or if we hear it from Hashem? The difference is, that only on Hashem can we apply the verse, "Kiss me with the kisses of Your mouth", which refers to the verbal relationship that the Jewish people has with Hashem. Had they wished to hear Hashem's voice – as we will in the future – they would have achieved the ultimate rectification. It would have perfected their element of wind (speech), because to hear the voice of Hashem is the ultimate level of speech that the soul can achieve.

Hearing the Torah from the mouth of Moshe, by contrast, did not perfect their element of wind, because although man received a breath of life from Hashem that enables him to speak ("ruach memalelah"), ultimately, our power of speech comes from Hashem, Who breathed into us the wind in our soul that enables us to speak. To hear the Torah from Hashem would have made us never forget the Torah, for it would have been the perfected element of wind/speech. Instead, we chose to hear it from Moshe; our element of wind therefore did not reach its completion, and that is why we are able to forget the current Torah we have.

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<sup>226</sup> *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:4

<sup>227</sup> *Erwin* 54a

Hearing a human speak, even to hear words from Moshe Rabbeinu, does not bring us to the perfected kind of speech. We can see this as well reflected in the fact that Moshe had difficulty with speech, for his mouth and tongue felt heavy upon him. When Moshe went up to Heaven to receive the Torah, every time he learned it, he forgot it, until it was given to him as a gift. The depth of this was because his power of speech was damaged, and that allowed him to forget.

The only way to avoid forgetting the Torah is when it is heard directly from Hashem. When one hears Hashem's voice, he never forgets it. "Forever, the word of Hashem, stands in Heaven."<sup>228</sup> When one fulfills the possuk of "My words which I have placed on your mouth", he merits the end of the possuk – "It will not be forgotten from your mouth, and from the mouth of your offspring, and from the mouth of the offspring of your offspring, forever." The "word of Hashem" that is the Torah is the root of all speech, and the breath of life that Hashem breathed into man, which enables man to speak, is what can ultimately reveal to man that "The One who has blown, blows from Himself." In other words, when one reveals how his power of speech is really rooted in the Creator's speech, the words that emanate from such speech can never be forgotten from the person.

Thus, the deep way to nullify the trait of forgetfulness is through connecting oneself to the reality of the Creator. We will explain this.

Man, by essence, can only live the present moment. The past is gone, and the future is not here yet. The only one who exists both in the past, present and future is Hashem. Since man's past and future is not here in the present, man can forget. By contrast, Hashem, Who "was, is, and will always be", cannot ever be forgotten. This is a clear fundamental.

All of Creation is only temporary, and that is why they can be forgotten, for the very essence of all creations is a temporary existence, and that is the reason behind why forgetfulness can take effect on creations. A created being, a person, is limited and temporary, and that is why he forgets as well as become forgotten. A person's words are here one second and they are forgotten a second later.

However, if a person makes sure as he is speaking to become connected to Hashem, Who "was, is, and will always be", then he is connected with the eternal, and he is connected in his speech with the unforgettable. The unforgettable is nursed forth from an ever-constant source, and there can only be one source that is ever-constant (and thus unforgettable): The One Who was, is, and will always be.

### ***A Kind of Torah Learning Which Is Never Forgotten: Learning Torah Modestly***

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The Sages said that "one who learns Torah in the synagogue with modesty, is one who will not forget it quickly."<sup>229</sup> What is the meaning of this? It can be explained according to the concepts developed until now: When one learns Torah modestly, meaning, when he connects himself to the "One who sits in the upper concealed chambers" – when he reveals the trait of modesty in the soul (see Understanding Your Middos #013 - Modesty), he connects to the ultimate Modest One that there is: Hashem. Hashem is clearly revealed through His actions, but His essence is hidden from us. When one learns Torah modestly, he connects himself to the reality of the Creator, Who is the epitome of modesty.

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<sup>228</sup> Tehillim 119:89

<sup>229</sup> Yerushalmi Berachos 5:1

This is also the depth behind the statement of the Rambam, that “One does not learn most of his wisdom except at nighttime.”<sup>230</sup> For our purposes, the meaning of this is that when one learns Torah at nighttime, when it is dark, a time in which there is more modesty, he connects himself to the true Modest One, Who was, is, and will always be.

When a person learns Torah without modesty, darkness can descend upon him, and thus he can come to forget his learning, because he is bound to the present moment, which is temporary; he is not connected to the past, and he is not either connected with the future, for he is not eternal. But when one learns Torah modestly, he essentially has taken the concealment (*hester*) that gets created from forgetfulness and darkness, and instead, he reveals modesty through it. This is how he connects himself to the Creator - and of the Creator it is said, “There is no forgetfulness in front of Your Throne of Glory.”

Concealment (*hester*) is a force in Creation, and it is up to man’s power of free will to choose if he will steer it towards holiness or for evil. When one learns Torah without modesty, he doesn’t access concealment for the purpose of modesty, and instead, the concealment will negatively come upon him, in the form of forgetfulness. But when one learns Torah modestly, he takes the force of concealment and reveals the modesty in it; and he will remember such Torah learning, forever.

This is how darkness of the soul is rectified: through using the power of modesty. In the beginning of this chapter, we brought from the words of our Sages that modesty is exemplified at nighttime. Now we can understand this with greater depth: it is because such a person takes the nighttime, the power of darkness, and transforms it into the holy power of modesty.

The simple understanding of this is that the person (in the times of the *Gemara*) would wait until nighttime to relieve himself, so that his private affairs should be done discreetly and not in broad daylight. It is because the nighttime is the tool a person could use as a tool to reveal the higher kind of modesty – to connect oneself to the reality of the Creator. A person who waited until the nighttime to relieve himself (in the times of the *Gemara*) was someone who knew the secret of modesty: to connect oneself to the Creator.

When a person is connected to the Creator, he remembers his Torah learning as well, and he doesn’t forget it.

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### ***Holy Forgetfulness: How Forgetting One’s Learning Can Be Constructive***

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There is an additional point to mention here, which is needed to complete the discussion.

Until now, it was explained, from many angles, about the negative side to forgetfulness, and that the power to remember is the side of holiness.

However, on a deep note, there is also a way how forgetfulness can be used for holiness. There is nothing in Creation that is always good or always evil; each force in Creation that exists can either be channeled towards holiness, or towards evil. It’s all a question of how we use each thing. Therefore, even forgetfulness can be used positively, so there is a holy way to utilize the trait of forgetfulness. There is both a simple and deep approach in how to use it for holiness.

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<sup>230</sup> Rambam *Hilchos Talmud Torah* 3:13

The simple way of how forgetfulness can be holy is contained in the words of the Midrash: “It is for the good of man that he learns Torah and forgets it, for if he would learn Torah and never forget it, he would learn Torah for only two or three years and then return to his labor, and he would never pay attention to it for all his life. But since man learns Torah and can forget his learning, he will make sure not to remove himself from the words of Torah.”<sup>231</sup>

In other words, since we are apt to forget our Torah learning, that makes us feel responsible to review our learning, and through reviewing our learning, we become more deeply connected to our Torah learning. Thus, in a sense, forgetfulness is an indirect cause for us to become more connected to the Torah. It reflects how “From the wound itself comes the recovery.” Forgetfulness is a destructive power, but it also acts as a catalyst to cause us to review our learning.

The element of earth can take things and return them to their root. Forgetfulness, which stems from earth, causes us to connect to our root.

But the deeper understanding is as follows. Our memory is an ability of our mind, which contains our *da'as*. When a person merits to reach the depth of the soul, which is above even his *da'as* – and this is referring to the statement of our *sefarim hakedoshim* that “the purpose of knowledge is to know that we do not know” – he reaches the power of holy forgetfulness. He “forgets” his *da'as*, because he is above it.

It is there that a person merits a complete forgiveness of his sins.

There is something very hard to understand: If Hashem doesn't forget anything, how can He forgive our sins? The deep answer is, though, that when a person goes above his regular intellect, he has access to the holy kind of forgetfulness.

Herein lies the secret of how the entire Creation will receive its rectification. As long as a person's sins are “remembered”, there would be no concept of *teshuvah*. But when a person does *teshuvah*, he is above memory, and that is why his sins aren't remembered by Hashem.

Of course, Hashem does not ever forget to reward our good deeds. Rather, what is meant here is that *teshuvah* is the novel concept that there is an area in our soul above memory: holy forgetfulness. It places a person above the regular rules, which are within *da'as*, and there, there is no “memory.”

Forgetfulness is produced from *hesech hada'as* (a removal of *da'as*), and there is a holy kind of *hesech hada'as*: “Moshiach will not come except with *hesech hada'as*.” This represents the holy kind of forgetfulness [to “forget” our *da'as*, because we will be above *da'as*].

### ***How To Use Forgetfulness For Holiness***

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Now we will give a practical example of this concept. When a person learns a part of the *Gemara* and he doesn't understand it, what should he do? He should empty out his thoughts and approach it as if he has never learned it before, and then start again from the beginning of the *Gemara*, anew. This is the holy way how to use the power of forgetfulness.

Every time there is forgetfulness, it is an opportunity for a person to realize that he must begin again anew. This is also the depth behind *teshuvah*. When a person does *teshuvah*, it does not mean that Hashem has remembered the

sin; He erases it completely! Hashem “forgets” the sin. This is not the regular kind of forgetting we are familiar with; it is the deepest kind of holy forgetfulness.

In the depths of the soul, there exists an ability to use “forgetfulness” for holiness: the power for a person to begin again anew. Similarly, when Rebbi Zeira left Bavel for *Eretz Yisrael*, he fasted 100 times so that he could forget all that he had learned in Bavel, in order for his mind to be clear to learn Talmud Yerushalmi.<sup>232</sup> Here we see the concept of holy forgetfulness, that when a person needs to have a new beginning, he needs to utilize his power to forget, even when it comes to the words of Torah. This is the depth that lays behind holy forgetfulness.

### ***In Conclusion: Repairing Forgetfulness***

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All new beginnings require a person to forget what was until now, in order to begin again anew. Thus, the depth of fixing forgetfulness is not just through remembrance, but through accessing the higher and holier kind of forgetting: the power to start from a new beginning.

Thus, the way to fix forgetfulness involves both accessing our power of remembrance [which is acquired through connecting with Hashem, and then we never forget what we learn, and this is also exemplified through the trait of modesty], as well as the higher way, which is to access the holy kind of forgetfulness [starting again anew after one forgets his learning].



## 015 | *Earth: Silence*

### *Modesty and Silence Have the Same Root*

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The *Gemara*<sup>233</sup> states that when one is relieving himself in the lavatory, he should be **modest**, and he should also be silent. From this we see that modesty and silence are related *middos*. They clearly bear the same root.

Since we know that modesty is rooted in the element of earth (as explained in Chapter 13: Modesty In-Depth), it follows that silence as well is rooted in our element of earth.

First we will explain the roots of this matter, and then we will expand upon it.

### *The Evil Use of Silence: Lack of Reaction*

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It is written, “And behold, man became a living spirit”, and the Targum translates this to mean that man became a ruach memalelah, a talking spirit. The power of speech is thus rooted in ruach, wind.

We know that the opposite of the element of water is fire, and the opposite of wind is earth. It follows, then, that if speech is rooted in wind, then its opposite trait, silence, is rooted in earth.

There are four kinds of organisms in Creation: doimem (the non-living, such as rocks), tzomeiach (growing organisms, such as plants), chai (live creatures, such as animals), and medaber (social creatures – human beings). When a person dies, he is no longer a medaber, and he instead becomes a doimem – he is still and silent. Such silence is not the kind of silence that we want to develop!

The custom is that a mourner is served lentils, because just as lentils do not have a “mouth”, so does a mourner have no “mouth”, for he is silent. The silence of the mourner reflects the situation of death he is mourning about, for the dead have become completely stilled and silent.

The element of earth is the source of unwanted silence. After a person dies, his body returns to the earth, and he can no longer speak anymore; the loss of the power of speech signifies the loss of his own life, for man is defined as a social creature. A person is “alive” because Hashem blew into him a nishmas chaim, a breath of life, which is his ruach/wind (his life spirit) – defined as his power of speech. At death, man loses his nishmas chaim, his ruach/wind, his power of speech – and returns to earth, where he no longer has speech; he becomes silent. Thus, death and silence are related concepts – that much is clear.

Silence [when it is evil] comes from internal hardening in the soul [which was discussed in *Understanding Your Middos #07 Internal Hardening*]. The Hebrew word for “silent”, shatak, contains the letters kuf and shin, which is the root of the word koshi, hardness. Silence is a trait that stems from koshi, internal hardening in the soul; it is when a person does not react, because he has become hardened inside. It is written, “And the living shall take to

heart” – a person who has inner vitality is soft inside, and that is why he reacts in emotion to things. But when a person is hardened inside, he cannot react. He resembles “a dead person, who cannot feel.”<sup>234</sup>

To illustrate, when a person is alive, his flesh and bones are intact, while a dead person only has bones, for his flesh decomposes. This hints to us that softness symbolizes life, while hardness symbolizes death. Internal hardening, as we explained earlier, is a nature of the element of earth; the elements of wind, water, and fire are all soft elements, and only earth is a hard substance. Silence is a lack of reaction, which really stems from an internal hardening in the soul. On a deep note, Hashem also utilizes this kind of silence, by keeping silent towards the wicked who blaspheme, [and this is the holy use of this power].

The *Gemara*<sup>235</sup> discusses the case of a shtuki, a person who is silent when others tell him that he is of questionable status. There is an argument amongst the Sages how to view his silence: Is his silence a form of admitting to the claims against him (and there is a rule of “Silence is like admitting”), or is he remaining quiet because he doesn’t care what others think of him? According to the second opinion in the Sages, he is quiet because he hardens himself inside, and he doesn’t react to what others are saying about him.

Earlier, we discussed the trait of brazenness, which stems from internal hardening. When brazenness and internal hardening combine, the result is a lack of reaction that is silence.

Moshe was told to speak to the nation, which shows us that speech is what enables the power to lead others. If someone doesn’t accept the words he is told, he doesn’t react to them. Such silence stems from an unwillingness to accept the words he is told.

The *Gemara* differentiates between a deaf mute and a deaf person who can talk. A deaf mute is called cheiresh in Hebrew, which has the same letters as the word shachor, blackness, which hints to the darkening of the soul, a trait that was discussed in the previous chapter. This reflects a nature in which a person does not hear the words he is told because he lacks the power to react.

This was also the ability that the Snake possessed: the Snake was silent and secretive – it used the power of silence for evil. *Chazal* say that the way of the Snake [or the evil inclination] is to whisper silently to a person its argument.

This is the first root of silence: a lack of reaction, which stems from internal hardening.

### ***Silence That Comes From Nullifying Oneself***

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There is another source which silence can be coming from in the soul, and it is a concept mentioned many times in the *Gemara*: that silence is like a form of admitting.

Evil silence is when a person is silent because he doesn’t react to what people tell him, and it comes from being hardened inside. But silence is positive and holy when a person is silent because he admits. In this instance,, the person nullifies himself to what is being said of him. This is the total opposite of silence stemming from internal hardening.

A person is silent because he is hardened inside which stems from an impaired element of earth. Such a person does not care about what people say to him; that is why he doesn’t react and he is silent. Such silence is evil. But

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<sup>234</sup> *Shabbos 13b*

<sup>235</sup> *Kesubos 14b*

when a person is silent to another's claim because he admits to the claim, he nullifies himself. Nullification (bittul) is also a trait that stems from the element of earth.<sup>236</sup> As it states regarding nullifying the chometz before Pesach, “*Let it be nullified and ownerless like the dust of the earth.*”

*Bittul* nullification is a discussion for itself [see Chapter 17]. What we need to know now, with regards to the current discussion, is how nullification and silence are connected concepts.

There is a halacha of shomeia k'oneh, “hearing is like answering”, that one who hears a blessing is considered as if he has verbalized it himself. This halacha is really based on the concept of “silence is like admitting” – the person is silent and listens, agreeing with what is being said, and that is considered as if he has actually spoken. From here we can see that in a way, silence can become a form of speech. This hints to us that the way of how silence can be rectified.

Silence that stems from internal hardening is caused by a person being silent to another's words because he does not agree, and therefore he does not care to answer the person. Such silence reflects a lack of acceptance to the words that one is told. By contrast, when one is “soft” inside – “soft like a reed”, and not “hard as cedar wood” – when he listens to another's words, he can accept what he is being told.

So far we have explained two kinds of silence: a lack of reaction, which is evil, and a silence that is a form of admitting to another, which is good.

### ***How Silence Can Be Rooted In Water***

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There is another root as well to silence. In Sefer Yetzirah<sup>237</sup>, it is stated, “The letter mem is silent, the letter shin hisses, and the letter aleph, [which stands for avir/air] is what decides between them.”

To simplify these words: in the four elements of earth, wind, water, and fire, the active elements are fire, wind and water, while earth is the element that contains them. The three active elements are parallel to these three letters: *aleph*/avir/wind, *mem*/mayim/water, and *shin*/aish/fire. The Sages are saying that the letter shin is a hissing sound, which calls attention; whereas the letter mem is a sound that is used for silencing. Thus, silence is rooted in water, in mayim, which is represented by the letter mem, a letter which presses down the lips and puts a silence to speech.

Until now we explained that silence is rooted in the element of earth, but from these words of our Sages we can see that silence is also rooted in water, in the “silent waters” represented by the letter mem that stands for mayim/water. Although it appears that water is noisy, because the waves are crashing, that is only because of the wind which causes the water to move and be tossed around; water itself it naturally silent.<sup>238</sup>

Now let us reflect into what the connection is between silence and the element of water.

### ***How Silence Can Be Rooted In Fire***

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<sup>236</sup> See *Understanding Your Middos #017-Nullification*

<sup>237</sup> *Sefer Yetzirah* 6:6

<sup>238</sup> As explained by *The Vilna Gaon*

The silence which stems from the element of water is represented by the letter mem, which produces the opposite sound of the letter shin. The letter mem is a sound that is silent, while the letter shin is a hissing sound. Mem represents mayim/water, meaning that water is silent. Shin represents aish/fire, meaning that fire is a hissing sound, the opposite of silence.

What is the difference between speech and silence? With speech, there are letters, and with silence, there are no letters. Hissing also does not produce any letters.

We find two kinds of sounds – voice, and speech. The mitzvah to blow shofar is to blow and hear a shofar sound, whereas the mitzvah of Kerias Shema is only fulfilled through the power of speech; for this reason, one must say the words of Kerias Shema carefully and with precision. These are two opposite sounds: the sound of a voice, which has no letter, and the sound of speech, which contains letters.

Thus, when we apply this to the concept of silence, we can discover that there are really two kinds of silence. One way to be silent is when speech is silenced, and another kind of silence is when a voice is silenced. These are two different concepts of silence, as we will soon see and explore more deeply. Just as there is a concept to use our voice as well as a concept of using our speech, so is there a concept of silencing a voice as well as silencing speech; and they are not the same thing. What does it mean to silence a voice, and what does it mean to silence one's speech?

Speech is rooted in the element of wind, for man has a ruach memalelah (talking spirit) breathed into him from Hashem that enables him to talk. Hearing a voice, which is reminiscent of hissing when there are no words, is a power that stems from the element of fire. Since earth is the opposite element of wind, and water is the opposite of fire, it follows that silencing one's speech is a power that is rooted in the element of earth, whereas silencing a voice is rooted in the element of water.

### *Fiery, Wordless Speech*

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This can be further applied to the concept of speech which we find in animals. Animals can communicate with each other, but this is not the power of speech that is rooted in the element of wind which humans possess. Only man contains the element of wind, for man has the ruach memalelah from Hashem. Animals can speak and communicate with each other, but their speech is rooted in the element of fire. The birds chirp with each other and communicate, but we don't hear it, because the chirping of the birds is a form of hissing which we do not register as understandable speech.

The Sages state that there were ten measurements of speech given to the world, and the women took nine of them, while the remaining amount was given to the all those remaining.<sup>239</sup> The nine measurements of speech which women took refers to a lower kind of speech, not the elevated kind of speech that is rooted in the element of wind. A woman's main element is fire [and man's main element is water], thus, her speech is mainly derived from the element of fire.

This is related to the fact that that “women have light *da'as*.” It is well-known that the *da'as* is rooted in the element of wind.<sup>240</sup>; Thus, a woman, whose *da'as* is not so dominant, has her power of speech mainly derived from fire, not from wind.

Wind is the connecting element between fire and water, because fire and water are two opposing ends, with wind in the middle to mitigate between them and connect them. *Da'as* is also called the connecting power, as we see from the *possuk*, “And Adam knew Chavah”, meaning, he became connected with her. Speech, which comes from the element of wind, is thus the connecting force between water and fire.

By contrast, the speech which animals possess, as well as the speech of women, is speech rooted in the element of fire, and a fire itself cannot connect with water.

We can see this clearly from our world: when a woman talks, she talks much more enthusiastically than when a man talks. The deep reason behind this is because the speech of a woman is rooted in fire, [whereas a man’s speech is rooted in wind]. Therefore, a woman’s speech is of a more “fiery” nature.

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### ***Rochel Imeinu Exemplified The Trait of Holy Silence***

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Which of our Avos and Imahos exemplified the trait of silence? The Sages praise Rochel Imeinu for being the epitome of silence. She is the mother of Binyamin, who knew about the sale of Yosef yet he did not tell his father; and she was the ancestor of Shaul, who did not tell others that he was king; and she was the ancestor of Esther, who kept her lineage a secret from Achashveirosh. All of these tzaddikim exemplified the trait of silence, and they all descend from Rochel Imeinu, thus, our Sages praise Rochel Imeinu for being the one who “grabbed the art of silence.”<sup>241</sup>

Esav is called the “evil fire”, while Yosef *Hatzaddik* is called the “holy fire” who will in the future burn up the evil “fire” of Esav; “Esav will be like straw, and the house of Yaakov will be like a fire (that burns the straw), and Yosef will be like a great flame (which will completely burn Esav).” The fire of Yosef will silence the fire of Esav, and he received this power of holy silence from his mother, Rochel. This is also the depth of the *possuk*, “Are My words not like fire, so says Hashem.”<sup>242</sup>

The speech of women is not the regular kind of speech which man possesses, for speech of women is rooted in fire.

Women took more percentage of speech than men did; if so, why don’t women have a mitzvah to learn Torah, since Torah is a mitzvah that utilizes the power of speech? However, the answer is because only a man’s power of speech is the kind of speech that is used to learn Torah. The words of Torah are called the “ruach” (wind) of Hashem, and man’s speech is rooted in wind. A man can learn the Torah through the power of *da'as*, whereas women possess a lighter form of *da'as*, which is not sufficient enough to learn Torah. A woman’s speech is rooted in fire, not in wind, and that is why her speech cannot be used to learn the Torah. With regards to learning the Torah, a woman utilizes the trait of silence, which is the trait exemplified by Rochel *Imeinu*.

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<sup>240</sup> **Editor’s Note:** Perhaps the connection between *daas* and the element of wind is because both of these are known as connecting forces. In the four elements, wind is always seen as the connecting element between fire and water, and *daas* is the connecting force in the mind which combines the information and knowledge in the mind and produces the mature understanding of the information.

<sup>241</sup> *Beraishis Rabbah* 71:5

<sup>242</sup> *Yirmiyahu* 23:29

Rochel *Imeinu* exemplified silence not only with regards to being silent from talking, but also because she knew how to silence her voice. The sound of a wordless voice is rooted in the element of fire, and Rochel knew how to use this power to silence her voice when it came to the marriage with Yaakov *Avinu* [the fact that she didn't reveal what Lavan was going to do, so as not to shame her sister].

She silenced her voice, and her son Yosef therefore merited to inherit her holy power of silence, which will be the future destruction to the "fire" of Esav and silence the evil fire.

Our Sages<sup>243</sup> revealed that Yosef was punished for not defending his father's honor when he heard his brothers calling his father "your servant." This was the downside to his power of silence, because he used his power of silence in the wrong place. **But in the future, the power of silence which Yosef possesses will be the power that silences all voices of falsity, and it will reveal the voice of truth in the world.**

#### Holy Silence: How The Voice of Hashem Can Be Revealed Amidst Speech

Now we will reflect: What happens when a power silences his speech, and what happens as well when a person silences his very voice? When a person silences his speech, he is left with his voice. At *Har Sinai*, there was a "great voice, and it did not increase." According to one of the Sages, this voice never stopped, and it still continues.

The understanding of this is that after the Ten Commandments were given at *Har Sinai*, the Torah was no longer being spoken in the word, but the voice of the Torah still kept going on. It was the voice of the Torah from which the Ten Commandments were carved from. The great shofar sound at *Har Sinai* was that great voice which did not stop, and it continues until this day. Thus, at the giving of the Torah, only speech was silenced, whereas sound itself was not silenced.

Here we can see a kind of silence in which speech is silenced in order to reveal the sound behind the words, the voice behind the words, which is the essence behind the words.

When Rochel *Imeinu* was silent it can be understood as a silence that stems from the element of earth, for she was silent from talking. But in her silence, she also revealed the "voice of Yaakov", the voice of truth. She revealed silence that is rooted in the element of water, but she also ascended speech and revealed the essence of speech, which is sound. She silenced her speech, and she revealed the voice behind it, the voice of Yaakov.

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#### ***"Their Hearts Cried Out To Hashem"***

Where can we see this concept manifest?

All speech is essentially a division of Hashem's voice, revealed through the human mouth, which can pronounce 22 letters of the Aleph Beis (and if we include the five "ender" letters, it's 27 letters). A sound, however, is just a sound/voice, as it is not pronounced. (Although we find different sounds of the shofar, it doesn't have 22 different ways of being pronounced). This is the power of wordless sound, a power of the soul.

Every sound can be clothed with any of the 22 letters, and that is how speech is formed. Speech takes sound and splits it into different combinations, whereas sound is unclothed by any letters. In simpler language, our voice begins in our lungs, travels up through the windpipe, and exits through the mouth. When the sound of a voice reaches the

throat, it is there that speech takes over and splits into different sounds, such as the different sounding letters produced by the tongue, teeth or lips. That is our power of speech.

But there is another kind of communication, which does not involve speech: “Their hearts cried out to Hashem.”<sup>244</sup> Their speech was silent, but the very voice of their souls came forth, in the form of a wordless cry to Hashem, screaming out from their hearts.

This is the depth behind the prayer of Channah the prophetess, whose “lips were moving, yet her voice could not be heard”.<sup>245</sup> She was davening Shemoneh Esrei, which is usually referred to as the silent prayer, for it is whispered. However, the Baal Shem Tov explained that even though our mouths are whispering the prayers, our heart is still crying out the words. Our speech is being silenced, for our mouths are not producing any sound [only quietly], but the voice still remains in our heart. This is the depth behind the concept of silencing our speech [during Shemoneh Esrei]: the speech is silenced, but the voice behind it is revealed.

Of course, Shemoneh Esrei is not a total verbal silence, because we are still saying the words. But to a certain degree, our speech is silenced during this time, and it can be a revelation of the voice of the soul, which remains resonant in the heart even though it cannot be audibly heard. “Their hearts cried out to Hashem.”

This is the holy kind of silence, the kind of silence which reveals the cry of the heart. It is a cry that comes from the depths of the heart. When a person is crushed and he feels that he is at the lowest point, it is precisely then he cries out to Hashem very strongly, from his heart, even though no words are leaving his mouth.

This is the secret of how the element of earth is rectified. It is the element of earth which can reveal this power of the silent cry, the inaudible sound of the soul which does not take the form of any letters.

### ***Silencing Sound***

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There is also a deeper form of silence. Earlier, we mentioned how the letter mem is a silent sound, while the letter shin produces a hissing sound. Hissing, which is a wordless sound, is rooted in the element of fire, and it is the language of the animals and birds.

There is a concept of silence not only with regards to silencing speech, but even with regarding sound itself. When a person wants to silence others, he says, “Sssssshhhh!” He hisses, with the “shin” sound. Thus, when we want to silence all sounds, we use the letter shin.

This is a kind of silence which we use our lips for. Until now it was explained about silence rooted in the element of earth, and now we will explain what silence rooted in water is. This is a kind of silence which is used to silence all sounds, even hissing sounds.

There are two ways for one to silence himself. Either he can press down on his lips, which will block any sound from escaping him; or, he can silence his voice within himself. Both of these methods are a kind of silence that is rooted in water of the soul, as we will soon explain.

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<sup>244</sup> *Eichah* 2:18

<sup>245</sup> *Shmuel I*, 1:13

The first method of silencing is mentioned in the *Gemara*<sup>246</sup>: “Press your lips against each other, and do not be overcome with a desire to answer back [when you get insulted, don’t respond].” In other words, one way to silence your voice is by simply pressing your lips together and holding yourself back from talking.

This is how your lips can be used to silence yourself; when the lips are pressed together, the resulting sound is “mmm”, the mem sound, which is rooted in mayim/water. However, this is the superficial method, because although the person still doesn’t answer back to his insults, inside he is still full of protest. His speech has been silenced, but his inner voice has not been silenced.

But when a person “shushes” others with the “ssshhhh” sound, it is a deeper kind of silence; it is putting a silence to all sound. This represents a power in a person to silence all sounds, all his inner voices. When a person does this, he enters a higher kind of silence.

What is the difference between the two kinds of silencing? We can see it brought out from the following.

The *Gemara*<sup>247</sup> recounts that when Moshe went up to Heaven to receive the Torah, he saw that Hashem was tying crowns upon the letters of the Torah; when Moshe asked Hashem the reason for this, Hashem explained to him that in a later generation, there would arise a man who would expound *halachos* from every crown on each of the letters of the Torah, and that this would be Akiva Ben Yosef (Rabbi Akiva). Hashem also showed Rabbi Akiva all of the halachos that Rabbi Akiva would expound, as well as the great reward in store for him; then Moshe was shown the death of Rabbi Akiva, in which he would be martyred by the Romans. Moshe asked Hashem, “Is this the Torah and its reward?!” Hashem said to him: “Be silent. This is what has arisen in My thoughts.”

How are we to make sense of this?

Moshe was drawn from the water, so he is connected with water. His power to be silent stems from his element of water, which is the power to silence speech. He could silence his speech, but when it came to his inner voice, he could not silence himself. Hashem said to him, “Be silent. This is what has arisen in My thoughts!” This was referring to the higher kind of silence: the power to silence one’s inner voice. When the inner voice inside a person is silenced, a person reaches the power of holy thought in the soul. This is the kind of silence which is referred to in the statement of our Sages, “A fence for wisdom is silence.”

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### ***Two Levels of Silence: During An Argument, and Calming Down***

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It has been explained, thus far, how to silence one’s inner voices of frustration. One way is to simply “ssshhhh” with the mouth, which holds down the lips so that no voice escapes it. The more inner method, however, is to silence the inner voice from within.

How can we see that the element of water is the root of either method? We find that sometimes water can act as a boundary, stopping something from spreading past its path. Water can also put out a fire, which shows us that water can silence sounds that are rooted in fire. We will explain this more in detail. Water acted as a boundary by the episode with the *Yam Suf*. The Egyptians were on one side, and the *Yam Suf* was on the other side, so they were trapped. Here, water acted as a boundary which didn’t let us get past it.

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<sup>246</sup> *Avodah Zarah 35a*

<sup>247</sup> *Menachos 29b*



## 159 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

We mentioned this concept earlier (*in Chapter Six*). Earth was first created from water and the water was made into snow, and from the snow came the earth. Thus, the power in earth to create limitations really stems from the water that it came from. Today we can see that it is earth which doesn't allow the water to get past it, for the ocean waves recede from the beach. But at its root, the ability in earth to create limitations really came from water originally. Water does not silence sounds; rather, it places limitations so that things won't spread past it.

The Sages said, "The world does not stand except upon the merit of one who holds himself back at the time of argument." When a person shuts his mouth, the only sound he can produce is "mmmm", the letter mem. He uses mem/mayim/water to silence his speech. But he still has not yet silenced his inner voice; deep down, he is still raging at the one who has insulted him.

But there is a deep form of silencing, by using his water to put out his fire. When one chooses to be silent instead of responding to insult, he can silence his inner voice as well from its rage.

When a person is being insulted in middle of an argument, one kind of proper reaction is that he can choose not to answer back, and hold himself back. This is the kind of silence that is rooted in water, that a person has the ability to silence his speech. But the deeper kind of silence is as Hillel would do: He was "not easily angered, and easily appeased."

He would calm down right away as soon as he felt any anger like using water to extinguish a fire. In the first kind of reaction, a person places limitations on himself, using the element of water/silencing in the soul. In the second kind of reaction, which is deeper, a person calms himself and therefore he does not respond – he puts out the "fire" completely. Thus, there are two ways to utilize the power of silence. Any mature-thinking person can feel this clearly in himself when he doesn't respond to anger: either he doesn't respond, but deep down he is still seething; or he calms himself down, and that is why he doesn't respond.

Anger, a trait rooted in fire of the soul, can be put out by "water" in the soul, in either of these two ways: 1) either by holding back from responding which uses "water" to place limitations upon oneself, or 2) by calming down internally, which uses "water" to put out the fire completely.

### ***How Silence Can Bring One To Wisdom***

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This deeper kind of silence which we are addressing is the kind of silence that can bring a person to attain the power of holy thought (*machshavah*) or wisdom, which is called *chochmah*.

Our Sages said<sup>248</sup> that "Silence is good for the wise, and surely for the foolish, for it is written, "A fool is silenced, while a wise person thinks." The commentators explain the simple meaning of this *posuk* to mean that if a person remains silent and he doesn't respond to insult, those who observe him will realize that he is really a wise person for not responding to the insults, instead of viewing him as a fool who doesn't defend himself from false accusation.

On a more subtle note, he is silent because he is merely taken aback and overcome with indignity, and he is merely ignoring the other person. This trait was discussed in the beginning of this chapter, and it is not the holy trait of silence. It is rooted in the element of earth, and it is simply a negative character trait in which a person hardens his reaction towards another and ignores another person's comments.

But the deeper meaning of the *possuk* is that the fool can get used to this trait of being silent, and though that, he will reach wisdom. If he responds to insult, he will not become wise, and he will remain an ignoramus. The silence of fools – to ignore others and not react to their comments – is a silence that stems from the element of earth, and it comes from internal hardening in the soul.

But when a person knows how to use silence for holiness, what happens when he is silent (even if this person is right now a fool, and he only knows how to have a fool's silence)? If he keeps learning how to remain silent in this way, his silence will eventually bring him to understandings. Hashem told Moshe to “*be silent, for this is what has arisen in My thoughts*”; our Rabbis explained this to mean that if a person acquires the trait of silence (by getting used to being silent and not responding to insult), he ascends to the power of thought – he gains chochmah, wisdom. As the Sages said: “A fence for chochmah/wisdom is silence.”

Thus, the deep meaning of the *possuk* is that when a person doesn't respond to insult, not only will those who observe him realize that he is wise, but that he will merit to leave the evil silence rooted in the element of earth. He will ascend to the higher kind of silence rooted in the element of water which is the power to silence one's inner voice making a person wiser.

### *Silence In Action, Speech and Thought*

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There is also an even higher, deeper kind of silence. One of the Sages in the *Gemara*, when he was proved wrong, was silent for some time, and later he gave an answer<sup>249</sup>. This is not because his mind had gotten confused. Rather, it means that he has reached the point of inner silence in himself.

This can be understood based on what we brought earlier, that Hashem told Moshe to be silent and not to question His ways, for His thoughts cannot be understood. The simple meaning of this is that the thoughts of Hashem are above human comprehension, they cannot be verbalized. Therefore, silence of the matter is preferred over asking about it. The deeper meaning, though, is because Hashem was telling him that if you are silent, you will be able to transcend thought.

Thus, there is a silence that is applied to action, speech, and thought: We can silence our actions, silence ourselves from talking, and we can silence our thoughts.

All of these are actually found on Shabbos *Kodesh*. On Shabbos, we are silent from **action** by refraining from the 39 forbidden labors. We are silent from **speech** by refraining from idle chatter<sup>250</sup>, and Shabbos was given mainly for the sake of immersing ourselves in more Torah study,<sup>251</sup> and the depth of this is because Torah study is in the realm above speech, for **thought** is a higher spiritual realm than speech.

Soon we will see how Shabbos also contains a **silence of our thoughts**].

The *Gemara* says that silence is a trait that should be used with regards to insults, but when it comes to Torah learning, one should not be silent; he should speak words of Torah<sup>252</sup>. The Baal Shem Tov puts a twist on these

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<sup>249</sup> See Shabbos 47a and Kiddushin 39a

<sup>250</sup> Shabbos 113b

<sup>251</sup> Yerushalmi Shabbos 15:3

<sup>252</sup> Chullin 89a

words of the *Gemara* and explains it to mean that if one is able to learn Torah, he should think of its words, which is a higher level than speaking of its words.

### ***Silence In Speech and In Sound***

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But there is a fourth, higher level as well to silence: to reach the inner silence that is beyond thought. This was the meaning behind the above-quoted *Gemara* in which the Sage did not respond for some time and only gave an answer later. At the *Yam Suf*, when the sea was split, they transcended thought. How? Nachshon ben Aminadav jumped in, from his *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice). The level of *mesirus nefesh* is above logic, so it is above thought; if something can be logically explained, there is no *mesirus nefesh*. When you do the right thing even when you don't understand - that is *mesirus nefesh*. Nachshon ben Aminadav reached it.

On a deeper note, this was revealed as well by *Har Sinai*, when the entire Creation became silent. *Chazal*<sup>253</sup> recount that “When Hashem gave the Torah, not a single bird chirped or flew in the sky... the angels did not move, and they stopped chanting “Holy, Holy”, the oceans did not move, and no creature spoke. The entire world was silent and deafened, and Hashem’s voice came out and said, “I am Hashem your G-d.”

This was a deeper kind of silence. Silence is usually referring to silence of speech, which is called *shetikah*, while a deeper kind of silence is when all sound is silenced; this is called *sheket*. At *Har Sinai*, not only was all speech silenced; all sounds in Creation were silenced. There was a silence to all speech, to all sounds, and to all thoughts.

“For every word that was uttered from Hashem’s mouth, their souls left them.”<sup>254</sup> The depth of this was because the soul/*neshamah* is called the intellect/*seichel*, and at the giving of the Torah, even their intellect was silenced. Thus, their “souls left them” – they ascended to above thought.

### ***Silence – The Way To Transcend The Limits of Creation***

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Now that we have seen the above concept, we will ask: what is the depth that silence must bring a person to? The world was created with ten utterances. Silence can bring a person to the point that is above the limits of the Creation. When Yehoshua told the sun to stand still in *Giveon*, the Sages explained that Yehoshua sang *shirah* instead of the sun. The sun is able to move only because it sings *shirah*, so when it stopped moving, the *shirah* stopped with it, and that is why Yehoshua had to sing *shirah* in its place.

Thus, what happens when the song of Creation is silenced? All movements in Creation are essentially being silenced! All of Creation is always moving. When speech is silenced, and when fire and water as well are silenced (when all sounds are silenced) Creation returns to the nothingness that it was originally; when the earth was completely filled with water. In the original state of Creation, the entire Creation was completely nullified to Hashem.

All of Creation was created from Hashem’s speech, and behind each utterance was the voice of Hashem that empowered it. At *Har Sinai*, there was a silence all speech, and the voice of Hashem was revealed. The entire

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<sup>253</sup> *Shemos Rabbah* 29:9

<sup>254</sup> *Shabbos* 88b

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Creation was silenced, and returned to the state of being totally nullified to Hashem, when there was nothing in Creation except for the presence of Hashem. At that moment of total silence in Creation, the entire Creation came to a standstill. All of Creation stood silent, and this revealed the One Who is Unchanging: the Creator, Who always was, is, and will be.

When we stand before Hashem [in *Shemoneh Esrei*], we must realize that we are at a standstill in Creation and standing “in the place” in front of Hashem, Who is Unchanging. That is the depth of why *Shemoneh Esrei* is called the Amidah, to “stand” in front of Hashem.

This is the depth of silence. As long as Creation is in movement, there can be destruction taking place. The word for silence, shetek (from the word shtikah) is the same letter as the word keshes, rainbow, because Hashem shows the rainbow to remind us of the original state of Creation, in which the original waters filled the world, when all was still.

The bond with the Creator is complete when it comes from the depths of the soul, from the inner silence in the soul, the “calm waters” in the soul which are represented by the letter mem, in which there is no movement. It is there that the total connection with the Creator is reached.

## 016 | *The Depth of Tikkun HaMiddos*

### *Beyond The 'Middos' In The Soul*

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We will now try to touch upon a certain inner point about the *middos* (character traits) of the soul - a point which is really the root of the study of our *middos*.

In the Torah, we find the word “middah” in a few instances. There is a tractate of Mishnayos<sup>255</sup> called “Middos”, which describes the measurements of the Beis HaMikdash. But the more common use of the word “*middos*” is referring to our character traits; our Ein Sof of “*tikkun hamiddos*”, improving our *middos*.

However, we must know that just as human beings have certain *middos*, so does Hashem have *middos*. There is Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish people. There are *middos* in Hashem, for Hashem has 13 attributes of mercy; there are 13 *middos* to expound the Torah; and the Jewish people contain their intrinsic *middos*. We will reflect into this. Hashem has *middos*. The word “middah” means “measure”, which implies some kind of limit. But we know that Hashem has no limits; that is part of our belief. So what does it mean that Hashem has ‘*middos*’?

There are 13 *middos* to expound the Torah, yet it is also written about the Torah, “It is longer in measurement than all of the earth.” The Torah is beyond measure. If we can conceptualize that Hashem has *middos* as well as the Infinite, and that Torah has *middos* but it is also endless, that can help us understand as well that the Jewish people, who contain *middos*, also contain a point in their soul which is beyond any measure.

Usually, when we think of working on our *middos*, we remain confined within our own *middos*, but we don't look beyond our own *middos*. Although it is true that we need to work on our *middos*, and it is part of our life's mission (as the Vilna Gaon said, “If a person does not work hard to break his *middos*, there is no purpose to his life”), still, although this is certainly a crucial aspect of our Ein Sof, there is more to our *middos* than just the *middos* we recognize, which are limited. Just as we need to work on our *middos* and improve them, so do we have a simultaneous Ein Sof to reveal in ourselves an unlimited point in the soul.

When it comes to our *middos*, we usually pay more attention to the part of improving our *middos*, whereas the point that is above our *middos*, the “unlimited” point in the soul that is not bound to any measurement, often remains hidden from us. Rarely is it ever spoken about.

### *“No Measure” In Place, Time, and Soul*

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Everything in this Creation can be found in place, in time, and in soul<sup>256</sup>.

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<sup>255</sup> *The Six Orders of The Mishna, authored by our Tannaim (early Sages), which includes Zeraim (Laws of agriculture in Eretz Yisrael), Moed (laws of festivals), Nashim (laws pertaining to women and marriage obligations), Nezikin (laws relating to monetary disputes), Kodashim (laws of the sacrifices and the Temple), and Taharos (laws of ritual purity and impurity).*

We already mentioned that *middos* are present in Hashem, in the Torah, and in the Jewish people. There are also *middos*/measurements of the Beis HaMikdash, of which an entire tractate is devoted to explaining. However, even in the Beis HaMikdash, where everything had a specific measure, we find something that had no measurements. The place of the Aron (the Holy Ark) had no specific measurements.<sup>257</sup> The Aron was really too big to fit into the Kodosh Kodashim, but there was a miracle that allowed it to fit there.

Inside the Aron, the Luchos were stored; the Torah was placed inside the Aron. The depth of this was because the Torah is beyond all measure, thus, it was fitting to place it in the Aron, which also had no measure. From here we can see that there is a concept of a place that is not bound to any measurement.

In time, we can also find a certain time in which there is no measure. Normally, times have measurements to them: the day is 24 hours, the week is 7 days, and the month is either 29 or 30 days, a year is 354 days, every 7 years is Shemittah, and every seven cycles of Shemittah is Yoivel. But if we reflect, each day has in it a point which cannot be measured. It is called *bein hashemashos*, (twilight), and we are not sure at what point the day ends and it becomes night.<sup>258</sup> It is treated as both the day and night with regards to halacha, but we are not sure exactly what it is.

In addition, on Shabbos there is a concept of *Tosefes Shabbos*, to add onto Shabbos, and according to most opinions of our Sages, there is no exact measurement to it. Thus, Shabbos is a kind of time which is not limited to any specific measure. Thus, we have seen how there is a concept of “no measure” in time. Now we need to see how this is true with our own soul as well. In the soul, there is also a point which is beyond measure; let us reflect where it can be found.

The most secret power in all of Creation is: the power of *da'as*. The concept of *da'as* implies that for every concept that exists, there is always an opposite concept; each thing is comprised of itself as well its opposite (“*dovor v’hipucho*”). For example, there is night and day, man and woman, above and below. We are aware that our soul has “measured” *middos* to it, therefore, if there is a part in our soul which contains measurements, there must also exist a point in our soul which has no measurements. We only need to know how we can reveal it.

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### ***A Clarification***

However, we will emphasize at this point that just because there is such a concept, this does not negate our Ein Sof to work on our *middos*, *chas v’shalom*. Rather, the intention here is that just as Hashem is unlimited, yet He also has the 13 *middos* of *rachamim*, and just as the Torah is unlimited yet it also contains 13 *middos*, so too does our soul contain an area of *middos*, as well as an area that is beyond the *middos*.

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### ***The Point of “No Measure” In The Soul***

It is upon us to understand what this point of “beyond measure” in our soul is.

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<sup>256</sup> “*Olam, Shanah, Nefesh*” – “World (Place), Year (Time), and Soul” – *sefer Yetzirah: III*

<sup>257</sup> *Bava Basra 99a*

<sup>258</sup> *Shabbos 23b*

If we deeply reflect, we can discover that all of the soul's abilities are all somewhat limited. For example, the trait of compassion has its limits. *Chazal* said that one must not be compassionate to the cruel. Compassion must be limited, or else one will come to feel sorry for even cruel people, and this twists around compassion and turns it into a form of cruelty.

Another trait is kindness. How much kindness is a person capable of doing? If a person wants to give charity to others, he cannot give money that he doesn't have. If he writes out a check with no money in his account, it is not cashed. A person can only give what he has; we are limited in how much we can give.

The trait of love also has its limits. A person loves his family, and therefore he strives to give to them their needs. As much as he would like to give to them, though, he cannot give to them beyond his limits. He can spend up to a certain amount of money on them and buy them gifts, but not beyond his budget. So our love as well is limited, because if love is defined by how much we want to nourish the person we love, we ultimately find ourselves limited, for there is only so much we can give. And even if we could define love as something that goes beyond giving and nourishing to others, it is still limited, because we are only human, and a human is limited.

So, being that we are human, our soul's abilities are limited as well. Even the deepest ability which we recognize ourselves has its limits.

It would seem that we cannot reveal from ourselves anything that goes beyond our limits. It is clear, from the viewpoint of our "I" at least, that we are clearly limited in our abilities. So what does it mean, then, that we have in us a point that is unlimited?

The Torah is "wider than all of the earth", as the *posuk* states; yet, if we were to look at the Torah as a body of knowledge by itself, without being part and parcel with the Creator, it would definitely be limited. The unlimited aspect of the Torah is because "Hashem and the Torah are one", and just as Hashem is unlimited, so is the Torah unlimited. So the only reason why the Torah is unlimited is because it is interconnected with Hashem.

The same can apply to the Jewish soul, if we deeply reflect. If we look at ourselves as an existence apart from the Creator (*chas v'shalom*), then indeed, we would be totally limited. We would be limited just as a chair and a table is limited. Working on our *middos* would be all that there is to our *middos*.

But there is a point in our soul which is unlimited, for the soul is interconnected with Hashem. Hashem dwells in the soul, as it is written, "I will dwell amongst them" – Hashem dwells in each person. So when the presence of the Creator is revealed in the soul, and a person feels nullified to Hashem as a result of this recognition, it is as if he becomes one with the Creator, so to speak, and then the unlimited in his soul is revealed.

So as long as a person views his existence as being essentially apart from the Creator, then indeed, he will be limited. Just as his hands and feet are limited, so will the abilities of his soul be limited. A person indeed cannot be endlessly giving and compassionate; he has limits. Our entire nature is to be limited. How much are we limited? This is different with each person. But we are all limited.

However, when a person reveals the Infinite within, when he reveals the Creator's presence inside himself, he reveals the unlimited aspect in his soul with this.

This concept is describing the purpose of life! Everyone will eventually reach it, but the only issue is: If this will be reached willingly by a person, though his free will, or if it will have to be forced out of him...

To illustrate: we would have left Egypt anyhow after 400 years. It wasn't up to Pharaoh; we were getting out of there anyway, whether he let us or not. What, then, was Pharaoh's test? Pharaoh was given the choice to let us go willingly. He didn't, so in the end we went out by force. There was no way that we would be left in Egypt. The only question was when and how, and if it would happen according to Pharaoh's wishes or not. Everyone will eventually have Hashem revealed within himself, where His light will dwell. We will all have this revelation in the future, may it come speedily in our days, with the coming of Moshiach. Then, this point will be revealed to all.

If so, where is our free will in all this?

The *Gemara*<sup>259</sup> states that if one merits it, he will merit Moshiach to come before the set time, but if he does not have merits, he will not merit Moshiach before the set time, [and instead he will have to undergo suffering in order to be purified so that he can merit it.] In other words, if a person doesn't merit, if he isn't purified, Hashem will have to bring upon him suffering (reminiscent of the ten plagues in Egypt, which forced them to recognize Him, parallel to the ten main abilities in the soul), until he is eventually purified and nullified to Hashem. If a person merits to purify himself, however, he will merit through his own free will the revelation of Hashem in himself, and he will not need to undergo any suffering.

Even the wicked will eventually see the revelation of Hashem, but they will be forced. Their souls will have to undergo Gehinnom in order to be purified, and "they become the dust underneath the feet of the tzaddikim" – they will be connected to the revelation, but in the form of being dust underneath the feet of tzaddikim.

It is impossible for any of us to evade the eventual revelation that will come upon Creation, for it is that we were created for. Hashem created all of, without exception, to reach this purpose. The only question is how each individual will get to it: Either through choosing to get there, by purifying oneself, and if not – one will have to be purified through the purification process of Gehinnom.

This is really the depth behind our entire power of free will, and I hope that every person will choose the right decision. But there is no room for doubt about this. We will all get to the revelation of Hashem's presence, and the only question is when and how.

It is man's nature to think of himself as an entity that is apart from the Creator. A baby is selfish, and it can only connect with its mother; it cannot connect with Hashem. As a child gets older and more mature – each on his own level - a person can eventually get to the point of recognizing Hashem's existence inside himself, and then he reveals the point of "no measure" inside himself; the point beyond the *middos*.

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### ***Revealing Our Point of Endlessness***

So we have the power of free will to decide if we will just live with our limited aspect – our *middos* – or if we will also live with our unlimited aspect, which is to reveal Hashem's presence in our soul.

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<sup>259</sup> *Sanhedrin 98a*



If one views himself as only being a limited creature, then he views his soul in the same way that he views his physical world: He has a house, money, children – which are all limited – and so too, in his spirituality, he has a good heart, knowledge in the Torah – areas which are really limited to him.

When one only knows of limitations, he will never get to the goal of life. If he lives only with physical limitations and never explores his spirituality, he definitely will never get to the purpose of life, but even if he is spiritual and he has made a lot of spiritual progress with his soul, he still will not get to the purpose of life, if he does not know about the unlimited aspect in his soul.

One must know that the purpose of Creation is: to reveal the Endlessness of Hashem within himself! It is there that point of “no measure” can be revealed to a person.

Understandably, revealing the Endlessness of Hashem in oneself is a lifelong task. We have no other Ein Sof on this world other than to reveal the existence of Hashem in our hearts. It is just that there are many ways to get there. We are currently discussing the Ein Sof of improving our *middos*, which is one of the ways of how we can reveal the Endlessness of Hashem within ourselves. Therefore, we will try to explain how fixing our *middos* is a way to reveal the Endlessness of Hashem.

Again, we will repeat and emphasize that this is only one aspect of our Ein Sof; it is like a drop in the ocean amidst the broad scope of our Ein Sof on this world. However, since we are discussing it with regards to fixing our *middos*, we will try to explain it.

### ***Endless Love***

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All of us have the power to love. Love is the root of all the *middos* (for the “world is built on kindness”, and kindness is the outcome of love). The biggest egoist will love only himself. Usually, someone with even minimal good *middos* will love his/her spouse, children, parents, and close friends; and the levels of love vary with each person.

Where does the power to love come from?

To know this, here is the following illustration. Let’s say a worker gets paid for his job. When his boss pays him, does the boss feel like he is giving away a part of himself, since he used to own this money? No. he used to own this money, but now he is paying his worker with the money.

But there is another kind of giving, in which a person will give something to another as a sign of being remembered. A person might give someone as a gift so that their friendship will always be remembered. When he gives the other this gift, the gift is a way of saying, “I am giving you my self.” He didn’t just give it to give it – he gave it so that he will be remembered by the person.

The Sages describe the Torah as “Ana Nafshi Kesavis Yehavis” – “I gave My soul in writing to you.” The Torah was the covenant that Hashem made with us, so that we will always remember Hashem. It is as if Hashem told us: “I am giving over to you My soul - in the form of the written Torah”.

Now we will return to the example of love, which we are using as a mere example of the concept we are describing. There is not one of us who does not feel what it means to love. Even the most superficial kind of person in the world, even a person who has no *Emunah* (may Heaven have mercy on him), can love; but he never thinks

about where love comes from. Just as he never thinks about where his hands and feet come from, so does he never think about where his love comes from. He feels simply “I am able to love, because that’s part of who I am.”

Baruch Hashem, most of us do not think like this. We all know clearly that the power of love inside us is enabled by Hashem. (We are not talking about the power to love Hashem, but the ability to love each other).

Hashem, Who has an endless amount of love, has cut for each of us a piece of His love, so to speak, and has given it to each of us. So our ability to love comes from Hashem. Does our ability to love each other have anything to do with Hashem? The simple answer is, yes, because Hashem wants us to use our ability of love for love of Hashem.

But the truth is that it can be compared to a person walking in the street when it’s raining and he has an umbrella, and he sees that his friend doesn’t have an umbrella, so he lets his friend join him underneath the umbrella. He didn’t give his friend the umbrella; he is letting him underneath it.

The *Gemara* says that Hashem said to Moshe, “I have a good gift in My treasury, and its name is Shabbos. I want to give it to Yisrael. Go and inform them.” The Lakewood Mashgiach<sup>260</sup> explained that it’s not that Hashem wants to take out the gift of Shabbos from His treasury and give it to the Jewish people. Rather, it means that Hashem wants to bring us into His treasury.

It seems that Hashem gave us all a power to love, and that He allows us to use a spark of His endless love and placed it into each of us. This is a superficial perspective, however. Hashem did not take His own love and plant it in us. He has instead taken us and allowed us to enter His own love. And since Hashem’s love is unlimited, the love that is found in us is unlimited. It is just that we only see the part of it that is limited. But in essence, the ability in love in us is unlimited, for it comes from Hashem.

Thus, the understanding is not simply that each of us received an ability to love from Hashem. The word of love is the same for each person, and we are all identifying it on the same level. It is just that each person sees only a part of it. Hashem brought each of us into His own treasury, into His world of love. The love itself is unlimited, but we only see the limited part of it.

The Sages gave a parable to explain this. Once the Caesar asked Rabban Gamliel, “You say that whenever there are ten Jews, the Shechinah dwells. How much Shechinah is there in the world?” He said to him, “How does the sunlight enter your home?” The Caesar replied, “The sun lights up the whole world.” Rabban Gamliel then said to him, “The sun is only one of the many servants of the Blessed One, yet it lights up the whole world. Surely the Shechinah of the Blessed One can light up the whole world.”<sup>261</sup>

The root of all *middos* is ahavah (love). There is only one force of love which Hashem created, and that love is unlimited. Hashem is endless, thus His love is endless. All that we know about the middah of love is a partial revelation of Hashem’s endless love. A middah is essentially a specific part of Hashem’s Endlessness that is revealed to us. There is a limit to what can be revealed, thus we only see a limited part of it. But in essence, love is one unlimited force.

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<sup>260</sup> Rav Noson Wachtfogel zt”l

<sup>261</sup> Sanhedrin 39a

These are very deep words. A person naturally thinks of his *middos* are limited. Why is this so? It is because we know we are human and limited, therefore we think our *middos* are limited. More specifically, we can actually see how our love is limited. You love something and then one day you stop loving it. A couple who loved each other might get divorced one day. Children are loved by their parents, but sometimes they anger their parents and they disturb them very much, to the point that the parents' love for the child can go into hiding. We see that there are limits to our love, and it does not seem to us that our love comes from the unlimited love of Hashem.

But the truth is that the love which we are capable of is really unlimited. We only see a part of Hashem's love, thus, we come to feel that our love is limited. But the reality is that the love inside us is really unlimited.

This is not my own novelty. These are the words of our holy Sages, which we mentioned earlier concerning the matter of the Shechinah<sup>262</sup>, and it is the depth of the entire reality of *middos*.

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### ***“A King Can Break Fences”***

When a person can identify this concept and internalize it, he gains an entirely new soul perspective. There is a statement, “Nothing stands in the way of the will.” Don't our limits get in the way of actualizing our will, though? But it is because our soul's abilities are really unlimited! This is like what *Chazal* say of a king: “a king can break fences and no one can protest him.”<sup>263</sup> In addition, the Sages said that the Jewish people are called *bnei melochim*, “sons of kings.”<sup>264</sup> All of us have a point of “king” within us – an unlimited aspect.

Every Jew's soul contains this power. “Hashem, Yisrael, and the Torah are one” – in other words, Hashem's endless is contained in our own soul! Why is it, though, that we often don't relate to our “endless” aspect? It is because we tend to think that we “live in the real world”. We are aware that in the tangible world in front of us, there are limits to our *middos*, both to our positive and negative *middos*; we identify ourselves as limited beings. The Ramban writes that Aristotle's mistake was that he only followed his feelings; he didn't believe in something he couldn't feel. If a person would just believe that his soul's abilities are not given to him by Hashem, and that it is rather Hashem bringing us into His unlimited world – this would entirely change a person's perspective towards himself and towards all others.

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### ***Fixing Our Middos, Together With Striving To Reveal The Endless***

So first, we need to have the correct perspective on working on our *middos*. We have started to explain that we have an Ein Sof to work on our *middos* as well as an Ein Sof to reveal the point that is above our *middos* (our unlimited aspect). It seems simply that we have two tasks before us: to work on our *middos*, and to reveal that which is above our *middos*. But according to what we have explained here, if a person tries to work on his *middos* but he is unaware of the “unlimited” aspect of *middos*, he is not able to really work with his *middos*. This is because he does not recognize what he's working with. Thus, whenever one works on a middah, he must not think that it is solely a

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<sup>262</sup> *ibid*

<sup>263</sup> *Bava Kamma 60b*

<sup>264</sup> *Shabbos 111a*

middah. Only when you recognize the depth of what you are working with and what it's made up of can you be successful when you work with it.

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***Fixing Our Middos: “Remove Yourself From Evil” and “Do Good”***

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All of us, more or less, are familiar with the external part of working on our *middos*. I believe, with Hashem's help, that each person here will grow to some level, as he studies the *middos*. But I also know that the growth here you will achieve is totally unpredictable and beyond anything you can plan.

In other words, there is a way for you to gain a 'shortcut' as you are working on your *middos*, where you can jump straight to the end of the road. Let me emphasize that I am not implying in any way that there is no value to practically fixing our *middos*; there is no way to skip it. But it is just that we must understand that in any Ein Sof, there are always two sides to it. There is a part of it where we remove the darkness (“Remove yourself from evil”), and there is a part of it where we reveal light (“Do good”).

Until now we have spoken about positive *middos*, such as ahavah. But when it comes to working on our negative *middos*, such as gaavah (conceit) – which is the root of all negative *middos* – how can we do it? The external part of fixing gaavah lies in lowering oneself and realizing that one's abilities are not his own. But there is also a more inner aspect which we need to make us as we work to uproot gaavah. Is gaavah a bad middah or a good middah? We have explained in the past that there is no such thing as a good middah or a bad middah. Every middah depends on how it is used. If it used appropriately, it is good, and when misused, it is bad. To illustrate, an apple is normally a good thing. But if you feed it to a one-year old, it is a choking hazard. The same is with the trait of gaavah. If we use it in the wrong place, it becomes bad, and if we use it correctly, it is good.

What is the root of gaavah? Is gaavah a human trait, or is it also a trait of Hashem? It is stated openly in the verse: “Hashem has reigned, He has donned grandeur.”<sup>265</sup> When a person misuses the power of gaavah, this is not the kind of gaavah that Hashem has. The Creator has the root of gaavah, and the root of gaavah is pure and holy. A person is able to misuse that root and exercise gaavah in the wrong places. But as for the middah itself, where does it come from? From the Creator! When a person realizes that gaavah comes from the Creator, he has found the spiritual light of this middah, and he will have an easier time uprooting the negative aspects of gaavah.

By contrast, if a person thinks that gaavah in essence is an evil trait, because he recognizes it within himself and he doesn't know that it stems from Hashem, then he is dealing with nothing but darkness, and “darkness cannot be chased away with sticks.” But if a person is working to uproot his negative gaavah and at the same time he realizes that the root of gaavah is in Hashem, he is applying light to the darkness. When the spiritual light of the gaavah is accessed, the false side to the gaavah will disappear.

To emphasize, there are two perspectives needed at once, when working to fix the trait of gaavah. There is an aspect of “Remove yourself from evil”, and an aspect of “Do good”. Just as we have an Ein Sof to remove the darkness from our *middos*, so do we have an Ein Sof to shine the light of that middah: to reveal the G-dly root of the middah. Both of these aspects are interdependent on each other in order for one to succeed at working on his *middos*.

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<sup>265</sup> *Tehillim* 93:1

Even when a person recognizes gaavah within himself and he doesn't attribute its root to Hashem, there is still an Ein Sof to sanctify gaavah: "And his heart was high in the ways of Hashem." There is a positive and holy kind of gaavah. This can certainly access the spiritual light that is contained in gaavah, but the higher spiritual root of it is accessed only when we are aware that gaavah is rooted in Hashem, "Hashem has reigned, He has donned grandeur."

### ***The Difficulty In Working On Our Middos***

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Therefore, when we come to work on our *middos*, we need to bring the "unlimited" aspect into our "limited" middah aspect. This means that for every middah we work on, there are always two sides to the coin: the middah itself that we are working on, and the "unlimited" aspect of the middah (its root in Hashem's Endlessness).

When we are only aware of working on the "middah" and we don't reveal its unlimited aspect, this is but half the Ein Sof. This is actually one of the reasons why people have such a difficult time when it comes to working on their *middos*.

Working on our *middos* is never easy. There are no shortcuts. But we are able to make it easier for ourselves, to a certain degree. This is when we are not entirely focused on the negative aspect of the middah – that in addition to working to uproot the negative aspect of the middah, we are also working to reveal the root of the middah, its unlimited aspect, which is rooted in Hashem's Endlessness.

Our Ein Sof in working in our *middos* is thus a two-fold job. We need to fight the evil and darkness contained in the *middos*, but we also need to reveal the G-dly source of each middah, and then we can succeed in removing unearthing the beauty of our *middos* from the pile of dirt that initially covers them.

Our Ein Sof of tikkun *hamiddos* can be compared to the following scenario: A valuable object falls into a pit, and we want to retrieve it, but it is stuck inside the pit, and it is heavy. How do we get it out? We send someone down into the pit to tie a rope around it, and another person stands at the edge of the pit, and together they move it. The person inside the pit tries pushing it upward, and the person at the edge of the pit pulls it toward him, until they eventually get it out. That is how we can relate to how we must work on our *middos*: we need to deal with the lowliness of each middah before it has been rectified – "climbing down into the pit" - and at the same time, we also need to stand at a higher place, "at the edge of the pit", so that we can elevate the middah from the place that it has fallen to.

### ***Example: How To View The Trait of Gaavah (Conceitedness)?***

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To apply this concept: all of us have a middah called gaavah (to be prideful), which, when we first discover it in ourselves, we see that it has fallen into the lowest depths of kelipah (the evil forces). How do we elevate and sanctify our gaavah from the low place it has fallen into? On one hand, we need to battle the negative uses of gaavah, pushing it upward to the higher place that it belongs in. At the very same time that we work on our gaavah, we also need to stand above it, and to lift it upwards from the higher place we stand.

Usually when a person discovers that he has gaavah, he thinks of it as a bad thing, and he would like to get rid of it. He wishes simply to erase it and destroy it. But gaavah cannot be erased, just like you cannot erase anything else on the world. We don't have a mitzvah to destroy and erase gaavah just like we have a mitzvah to destroy idol

worship. Rather, gaavah stems from a G-dly light, and it can fall into the wrong places, and we need to uplift it and reveal the G-dliness of this trait, when we fight its evil uses and we also channel it in its holy and proper direction.

If one wishes to simply “break” his gaavah because he wishes to rid himself of its presence, it will only prove detrimental. There is a famous statement of the Kotzker Rebbe that, “If you break a middah, you will end up with two pieces of it.” If until now the person only had one piece of gaavah, he will now have “two” pieces of gaavah to deal with! So, how do we fight our gaavah? Should we not fight it? Chas v’shalom. We should fight it. But we need to fight it with the proper perspective. Our Ein Sof of fixing our *middos* is always to return the middah to its source, to its holy root.

When is gaavah evil? When we use it for the ego. When is it holy? When we recognize it as a G-dly spark that needs to be channeled to its holy direction. Instead of seeing gaavah as a function of our private ego, we need to return it to the G-dly spark that lays within it. We should not be uprooting the gaavah that is in us. All we need to do is to change our perspective towards it and how we approach it. We need to relate to it as a creation of Hashem.

### ***Revealing “The G-dly Light” In Our Souls***

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All that has been said here is not meant to be a purely intellectual discussion. The words here are certainly enlightening to the intellect, but they have a lot of practical use. How we can practically work upon these concepts here? First of all, we must reveal the “G-dly light” from within our soul and bring it to the fore. The G-dly light can raise any negative use of the *middos* from the ego and bring it back to its holy source, but if we haven’t revealed the G-dly light yet, there is nowhere to elevate the middah to!

The Baal HaTanya said that there are some people who wish to elevate all the G-dly sparks that have fallen into evil, but they don’t know how, because they need to know what it is like to be below in order to be able to stand below and push it back up. But if someone is only below and he has never developed the higher space to go to, he has nowhere to raise the G-dly sparks to. He first has to elevate himself to the higher plane, and then he can do the work of raising the G-dly sparks upwards.

Thus, if one has not yet revealed the G-dly light from within his soul and he is trying to work on his *middos*, he is missing the inner tool that is necessary to work on the *middos*. He will be trying to uproot the *middos* from within himself, but he has nowhere to connect the *middos* to; he is unaware of their source. Even if he can find a way to use the middah for holiness, this is still not yet the source of the middah, and he fails to connect the middah to its stable source that it comes from.

When one reveals the G-dly light of the soul, the light of Hashem’s Endlessness will be shined upon the *middos*, and the point of “no measure” will then be revealed in the *middos*. On one hand, the person needs to fight with the negativity present in a middah, and at the same time, he shines the G-dly light upon it. Through these two aspects together, the middah is taken out of the negative place it has fallen to and it is elevated back to its source.

It’s not enough to just “know” about your Godly light in your thoughts; you can’t work with an ability of your soul unless you feel it. It is written, “And you shall know today, and you shall settle the matter upon your heart.” The knowledge is just a tool that we need to use in order to integrate anything into our heart, where it becomes a real feeling to us. If we just know about something with our minds, it will not be enough to work with. Therefore, the first thing we will need to do is to sense Hashem’s existence, in our heart. After we attain that real sense of His presence, our Ein Sof of fixing our *middos* will become much deeper.

***What Comes First – Emunah Or Tikkun HaMiddos?***

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The problem we face, however, is that if we haven't yet fixed our *middos*, it is hard to feel the G-dly light of our soul! And as long as we do not feel the G-dly light in our soul, it is very hard to work on our *middos* at the same time that we are trying to reveal a sense for Hashem in our heart. Isn't this a paradox?

Yet, this is the secret of our life. The *Gemara* says that a slave is freed when he receives the divorce document from the owner, even though he previously doesn't have a "hand" of his own, for everything he receives belongs to his owner. If so, the *Gemara* asks, how is a slave ever freed? The *Gemara* answers, "His document and his hand come simultaneously." Our own inner Ein Sof is also a "simultaneous" Ein Sof, where we must do two things at once. On one hand, we need to work on fixing our *middos*, and then we can reveal the G-dly light, and from there, we can return to fix our *middos* in a deeper way.

The Baal Shem Tov gave a parable to explain this. A person takes a barrel of wine full of sediment, drains the barrel from the sediment, and pours the wine into a cup and drinks it. Then he takes the wine and pours into a thinner strainer, and now we can see that there is still some sediment left over on the strainer. We can ask: Did the sediment not get emptied the first time around? The answer is that it did, but the quality of the straining differed. The first time it wasn't strained as well, and the second time it was strained much better. Either act of straining was important, though, because they both refined the wine.

The more a person reveals the G-dly light within, the deeper he can fix his *middos*. The more and more one keeps revealing the G-dly light, the more refined his *middos* will become, and the cycle can keep continuing.

***Realizing That Our Middos Come From Hashem***

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We can now have a deeper understanding of the words of the Vilna Gaon, that "If a person does not fix his *middos*, what is the point of him living?"

If we just view the *middos* as a separate entity unto themselves that have nothing to do with a G-dly source, then it is too difficult to understand the words of the Vilna Gaon. But if we have the understanding that working on our *middos* is about revealing the G-dly light in them, when we understand that each middah is but a partial revelation of what that middah really is as a greater whole, and that it is really rooted in the infinite, in "no measure" – then it is much easier for us to understand why the whole Ein Sof of our life is about fixing our *middos*.

It is because working on our *middos* doesn't just mean to uproot their negative uses. Even our good *middos* need to be understood properly. We need to know that all of our *middos*, all of the abilities of our soul, do not really belong to us. Not only are they each a gift from Hashem, which Hashem can take back any moment; they are even more than that. Our good *middos* do not come from ourselves. This is not just about being grateful to Hashem that He gave to us these *middos*. He implanted in us these good *middos* - Hashem has entered the good *middos* into us, and that is how we have them!

Even the negative sides to our *middos* were implanted in us by Hashem. Sometimes a person adds onto them on his own volition, and when that is the case, he must run from those parts he has added on, which are not from Hashem; just as Yosef ran away from the wife of Potiphar. One needs to enter into the good *middos* in his soul and leave behind the negative aspects of them. But in either case, the *middos* are not our own.

When these concepts are absorbed deeply (first in the mind and then internalized in the heart), one will begin to live with the proper, truthful perspective towards life. What is that perspective? It is not like how some people erroneously think, to believe that Hashem does everything and therefore he is not responsible for his *middos*. This cannot be true. The abilities He implanted in our soul are His, not our own, and our Ein Sof is to remember this, and use the part of our *middos* which is revealed to us, to keep connecting to our good *middos*, and to run away from the negative sides to our *middos*, by removing them from the place they have fallen to and returning them to their holy root.

### ***Coming Closer To Hashem Through Working On Our Middos***

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Thus, the introduction of working on our *middos* is, to understand what a “middah” really is. Before we enter any endeavor, we try to learn about it so that we know what we are getting into. We don’t start driving a car if we have never learned about the basics of the gears. So too, when entering the Ein Sof of tikkun *hamiddos*, we need to understand its nature beforehand.

We all want to work on our *middos*, and indeed, we have begun to enter this Ein Sof, each person on his own level. But there is a fundamental introduction we need, of how to enter this Ein Sof: We need to understand that our *middos* are not our own. They are not “my” *middos*, but *middos* of the Creator of the world, Who has revealed to us but a partial layer of the *middos* that we see in ourselves.

When we have comprehended this concept, first with our mind and then with our heart, we then receive a great new depth of our bond with the Creator. Why? Let’s say that I view love as a middah as “my” middah and I do not realize that it is really Hashem’s middah. I may thank Hashem for giving it to me as a gift, but I might still think that the love is “my” middah now, and I do not see it as an offshoot of Hashem’s middah of love. If that is the perspective I have towards my ability to love, then my ability to love does not connect me to the Creator.

But if I am aware that love does not come from myself, but from the endless love of the Creator, Who is infinite – that will mean that every time I feel love, the love is connecting me to the endlessness of the Creator. Although human love is limited, and although we do not always love appropriate things, the love in essence can always be seen as a power that comes from the Creator, and not from me. Our Ein Sof is to remove the negative uses of the love, but the love in its essence is still coming from the Creator. Hashem allows part of it to be seen in ourselves, but it is really stemming from the endlessness of the Creator. Hashem allows us a partial revelation of His endless love to be seen in us, and that is what we see in ourselves as the ability to love.

Sometimes we do not always use this revelation correctly, where we use love for the wrong reasons. When that is the case, we need to limit the ways we are using our love, so that we aren’t misusing the revelation that Hashem has allowed in us. We began this chapter by explaining the concept of “no measure”. We find the concept of “no measure” by Hashem, by Torah, and in our own souls as well, there is a place of “no measure”, a place of the unlimited and infinite. Where is this unlimited aspect of our souls?

While we recognize the limitations of our own souls, at the same time, we can also reveal the aspect in our soul that is connected to the unlimited. The only issue is how we view our own limitations. If we simply view our limitations as nothing but human weakness, then all we will see is the fact that we are limited. But if we view each “limited” middah in ourselves as part of the Endlessness of Hashem, and that the limited part we see in ourselves is but a revelation of Hashem’s Endlessness, we then reveal the G-dly light within, and in that way we are connected to the EinSof, to the Endless of Hashem, through our *middos*.



***In Conclusion***

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Understandably, this connection we can have with the EinSof (the endlessness) of Hashem through the work on our *middos*, is but one of the many different ways we attain a bond with the Creator. The truth is that all of Creation is like a giant system of so many different strings, bonds, and bridges of how we can connect ourselves to this reality of endlessness, of Hashem.

In these words, we attempted to explain the end of just one of those ‘strings’, which we can use to grab onto as a means of connecting ourselves to the Creator. It is how we need to view all of our *middos*, of how man connects himself to the limited *middos* that are found within our soul, whether they are positive or negative – and to connect them to the endless reality of the Creator.

## 031 | *Eliminating Desires*

### *The Middos that come from Water in the Soul*

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We have merited to learn, at length, about the element of earth in the soul. Now we will begin, with Hashem's help, to study our element of water.

The element of water in the soul, Rav Chaim Vital writes (in *sefer Shaarei Kedushah*), is the source of the *middos* known as taavah (desire), taanug (pleasure), chemdah (envy) and kinah (jealousy). A person desires pleasure, and the branching traits which result from this are envy and jealousy.

The first middah in our element of water we will discuss is taavah, desire (or lust).

Avraham Avinu is the personification of ahavah/love, which is a trait that is rooted in the element of water. What is the difference between having a taavah (desire/lust) for someone/something, which is evil, and having a genuine ahavah (love)?

From a superficial understanding, it would seem that when a person loves something that is proper, that is true love, and when a person loves something improper, it is just evil desire and lust.

### *Lust Separates, Love Unifies*

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But upon an inner understanding, the difference is that real love means to become one with another, while evil desire is to superficially “love” the other, remaining apart from the other.

This is because real love, which is ahavah, has the same numerical value as the word Echad – “One.” Love is only reached when we become one with the one whom we love. Love comes from being one with another, and it also leads to oneness with another.

Taavah/Lust, on the other hand, while appearing to look like love, really serves to separate people. When a person just “desires” the other and doesn't really love the other, they grow further apart – as it is written, “When desire is sought, there is separation.”

When is a desire just an evil desire and a lust – taavah - and when does it become love, ahavah?

### *Love is Based on a True Ratzon For Another*

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The Hebrew word for love is ahavah, which comes from two words – “Av bah”, “He wants it.” When a person wants something, when he has a true will for something, and thus he loves that thing.

Another way of understanding is that when one wants something, he feels a love to it, because the will, which means ratzon, comes from the word merutzech – to feel satisfied by something.

The ratzon/will of a person is the root of the entire soul. This kind of will is the inner kind that a person has, the kind of will that is called “merutzeh”. It is not just any kind of will and desire that a person has – it is the ideal kind of will.

This helps us understand the difference between real love, ahavah, and fake love, taavah, which is just lust. When a person really loves another, he has a true and honest ratzon for that other person. He is merutzeh with that person. But when a person just has a lust for another, he is “loving” the person only because he’s missing something; he is not merutzeh with himself. There’s something he doesn’t have in his life, and he’s trying to replace his lack through having a relationship of “love with the other person.

That is why desires and lusts for another person just cause more separation between the two people, and it doesn’t create a genuine love. The person with mere desire for another person doesn’t seek to really love the other person, and thus his desire for the other person is merely selfish. It causes separateness between himself and the one whom he will attempt to “love.”

Desire, taavah, is essentially to desire something a person doesn’t have. When a person feels that he’s lacking something and he wishes to replace it through another person, it’s like he’s trying to “steal” for himself a satisfying feeling of satisfaction that will cure his emptiness. It is like what is written in Mishlei, “Stolen waters are sweet.”

### ***Love Between a Husband and Wife***

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The Torah says that a man must leave his parents and cling to his wife, and that they should “become one flesh.” What is the ideal love between a husband and wife, according to the Torah’s view? Before they got married, they were two separate people, but now that they are married, they are one. That is genuine love – it takes a person and returns him to his original situation. The original situation of man was that he was just one, and in marriage, the love between a husband and wife can bring a person back to being “one”.

The Sages say that a man must love his wife “just as he loves his own body.” This is not a superficial kind of love – it’s not “romance” that people think. It is the love that Adam and Chavah had toward each other when they became one. It is to return to the ideal situation of man – to be one.

Ahavah/Love is Based on “Da’as”, Taavah/Lust is When There is No Da’as

When a person is asleep, he cannot connect with others. Sleeping is a time in which we are all apart from each other; when we sleep, we don’t have Da’as, and when there is no Da’as, we cannot love. But when we are awake, that is the time when we can connect with others, and that is the time when we have the chance to be unified with others. This shows us that our love towards others can only be when it is coming from our Da’as.

Let’s say a man is unmarried, and he sees another woman and feels that he has “fallen in love” with her. It’s not love! The only love he can feel right now towards another woman is just taavah, lust. He cannot love, because love is to become one with another, and he cannot be one with her, because he is not married to her. For this reason, there is no such thing as a man loving another woman if they aren’t married.

A different way of understanding the difference between ahavah/love and taavah/lust is as follows.

When a person just has a lust and a desire for another, he thinks he loves the other person; he is attempting to “form” a relationship with the other person, because in reality, they are not one. He therefore attempts to “form” a

relationship with the other through attempting love. But with real love – like in the ideal marriage between husband and wife - the person is not “forming” a relationship with the other; he is rather strengthening the already existing bond. He is deepening the bond that is already there.

This is essentially the difference between tzaddikim and the wicked, with regards to how they relate to Hashem. The wicked think that in order to become close to Hashem, one has to “form” a relationship with Him, and that is why they never get there. But the tzaddikim know that we get close to Hashem by strengthening our bond with Him that is already there and existing.

With taavah – mere desire and lust - it’s all about “Me.” Desire is to think about one’s own needs: “I feel a desire.” We can see how this is true both with regards to how we relate with people, and how we relate to Hashem.

When a person desires to have a relationship with Hashem, it could still be rooted in his own ego; “I feel a need to connect to Hashem”; he is only thinking about his own interests in his relationship with Hashem, not about the actual relationship. Such a person does not yet have ahavah towards Hashem; he merely has taavah...

But when a person wants to have a relationship of love with Hashem – not simply to desire a connection for his own interests, but because he sincerely wants there to be a relationship of love between him and Hashem – this is ahavah. It is to think about what comes before “Me”: Hashem. It is to think: “I am connecting myself to what was before my existence – Hashem. I am not forming anything new here – I am only deepening the bond that has always been here.”

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### ***What It Means To Truly Love Another Jew***

If a person wants to have Ahavas Yisrael (love for Jews), it has to be the right kind of love. Why should we love our fellow Jews? We need to love other Jews simply because we are all a part of Hashem and the Torah! That is the proper way how we should view another Jew. If a Jew loves another Jew for any other reason, it is not real love!

What is Ahavas Yisrael? If a person really loves a certain friend of his, but not someone else, he has no Ahavas Yisrael yet! It is not real love, because it is a “specific” love. Real love for another Jew is to love each Jew unconditionally. Ahavas Yisrael is to have “no favorites” – it is to love every single Jew, without exception, regardless of our personal tastes.

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### ***Desiring The Eitz HaDa'as Vs. Desiring The Eitz HaChaim***

When a person is asleep, he cannot love others, as we said before. Only when two people are awake can they form a connection with each other and come to love each other. Why? Because love is only possible when a person has his Da'as, which is only when one is awake. Love is only possible when there is Da'as.

Thus, the way we fix our trait of taavah/evil lusts and desires, is by turning it into real love, ahavah.

When a person just lusts after and desires someone, it resembles the desire of Adam and Chavah to eat from the Eitz HaDa'as, the Tree of Knowledge. Such a desire was evil, because it was simply a desire for knowledge. But the true kind of desire we need to have is to desire an honest and genuine love for another. We need to desire to eat from the Eitz HaChaim, the Tree of Life – in other words, we need to desire life itself, the ideal kind of life.

That was the depth behind why the Tree of Knowledge was forbidden to Adam and Chavah, and why the Tree of Life was permitted. To eat from the Tree of Knowledge is merely a desire for knowledge, and this is taavah. It represents lust, the detrimental kind of desire. Had they desired true life – to eat from the Eitz HaChaim – their desire would have been coming from a desire to have pure love for Hashem.

What is the difference between a desire for knowledge, which represents evil taavah, and a desire for life, which represents ahavah? The Sages say that “Torah scholars have no rest.” Why? Because their Da'as is constantly working, so they are always active. In this sense, they have no rest. When a person just has a desire for Da'as, like a desire to know more and more information, then such Da'as is evil. But when a person loves the true meaning of life itself, he wants to live in the right way. He has the true ratzon to have in life, and he will be merutzeh. He is pleased with his situation; he is happy with his lot in life. And as we brought before, being merutzeh will help a person reach true ahavah.

### ***Uncovering Inner Happiness***

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*Chazal* say that one must be happy with his lot in life. To be happy with one's lot in life doesn't mean simply for one to simply be happy with whatever he has even though he doesn't have other things. It is more than that; it is essentially to be happy with one's very existence. Be happy with your mere existence!

How can we draw this inner happiness from within ourselves? We must know that if a person is happy only with whatever he constantly receives and gets, he really isn't calm. He might get some happy feeling from wishing for what he wants, but this is not happiness. It's like a desire to eat from the Tree of Knowledge – an endless desire that can't be satisfied, an evil desire. To truly love life – to truly be happy with one's lot -- a person has to be happy with the mere fact that he exists. We know that a person has to have a simchas hachaim – a “love of life”. What does it mean to love life? Does it mean to simply love “life” in the superficial context? No. It means that a person should be so happy with his very own existence, with the mere fact that he lives!

When a person just has taavah/desire, he wants more and more to get added on to himself, and he doesn't appreciate what he really has. He won't be happy, and he will spend life chasing various taavah. But when a person has real ahavah/love for his life, he is appreciative of what he has; he is really happy - with himself, with his mere existence.

### ***The Upper Waters and the Lower Waters***

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There are two kinds of water in creation – the “Upper Waters”, which are in the heavens, are waters of blessing, while the “Lower Waters”, which is the sky and the rain, bring destruction.

Evil desire, taavah, comes from the element of water in the soul, and so does ahavah/love. When we have evil desires, we aren't happy with ourselves, so we want more; this comes from the Lower Waters in creation, the water that brings harm. But when we are happy with ourselves, we are using the right type of water in Creation – the Upper Waters, the waters in the Heavens, which only bring blessing.

### ***When Physical Desire Is Holy***

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## 180 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

However, there is such a concept as taavoh d'kedushah – holy desires. When can desire be holy?

We are currently living after the sin of Adam, in which desires entered the world. Before the sin, Adam and Chavah were able to unite purely on a soul level, and the physical body was not involved in their union. Now that we are after a sin, the body is involved, so the faculty of physical desire is inevitable in the union. Since there is no way for the spouses to bond with each other without physical desire – now that we live after the sin of Adam – physical desire indeed has actually become an essential factor in the union. However, its role must be understood, or else it becomes disastrous to the relationship.

When we use physical desire solely for the sake of having the enjoyment of the physical desire, then we abuse our element of water. Instead of utilizing our element of water in the soul for ahavah/love, the love becomes lust, and this is the downfall of our entire element of water in the soul.

We need to use physical desire in a healthy way. We need both ahavah and taavah present in marriage; we will explain why.

A husband cannot only love his wife (ahavah) without having physical desire (taavah) for her, nor should he only have physical desire for her without having true love for her. If a person only loves his wife, but he has no physical desire for her, he is living in his imagination, and thinks he's like an angel who doesn't have any physical desires. He is delusional and acting evil.

The opposite problem, though, is when one just has a physical desire for his wife, but he doesn't love her. He desires her, but only physically, and not because he wants to unify with her and become one with her through the union. Such a lifestyle resembles that of a non-Jewish marriage.

The way of the Jewish people, the way of the holy Torah, is to use our physical desires as a tool to reveal the love in our souls for another. This is the secret of taavah d'kedushah which the Jewish people possess.

## 032 | *Pleasure and Its Purpose*

### *“Oneg”/Real Pleasure Vs. “Nega”/Fake Pleasure*

The *middos* of taavoh (desire) and oneg (pleasure) come from the element of water in the soul. Generally, lusts and desires are evil, while pleasure, oneg/taanug, is referring to a good way to experience enjoyment. What is taavah/desire, and what is oneg/pleasure – and why are they different?

Pleasure, the power of taanug in the soul, is when one really and honestly enjoys something. The Sefer Yetzirah writes that “There is nothing more good than oneg (good pleasure), and there is nothing more evil than nega (evil pleasure).” The opposite of oneg – real pleasure – is when we flip around the letters of this word, and we get “nega”. When one misuses oneg/pleasure, the oneg becomes nega; the pleasure becomes evil.

We must have oneg on Shabbos, and we must have oneg in serving Hashem. If the concept of pleasure is good and holy, then what is the difference between good pleasure, oneg, and evil pleasure, nega?

When one just enjoys himself, for no other purpose other than enjoyment, his pleasure is evil. He’s not getting anything out of his pleasure – what he wants is really far away from him, and he is just left with the pleasure involved in trying to get it. But when a person has real pleasure – oneg – he attains something through his pleasure. When a person enjoys Shabbos, he has oneg Shabbos, and he is actually feeling Shabbos; such pleasure is the good and holy kind of pleasure. By contrast, when a person eats during the weekdays, there is no oneg Shabbos, he doesn’t have the true kind of oneg. He is left with just physical pleasure from the food.

What is the difference between good pleasure, oneg, and bad pleasure, nega?

Good pleasure, oneg, comes as a result of ahavah/true love. When a person has real love for something, the pleasure he gets out of it will be good. But evil pleasure is when the pleasure is coming simply from a desire, or a lust, for what the person wants. If a person’s pleasure comes from genuine “love”, then it is rooted in holiness. But if a person just “desires” the pleasure, and he has no real love for what he is attempting to enjoy, then the pleasure he feels is evil.

Why is it that a desire and lust for pleasure is bad, while a real love for pleasure is good? What is the difference between “desiring” pleasure, which is evil, then the real “love” for pleasure, which is good?

We can see the answer to this from how our body experiences pleasure. The power of oneg in the soul is also found in the body. The part in the body that gives a person physical pleasure is his Bris Kodesh (the male organ, which gives a man pleasure during marital relations). When a person performs his marital relations in the right way, with the proper motivations and intent, the physical pleasure that he experiences from it can reveal to his the soul’s power of pleasure to the person, which is rooted in holiness. But, this part of a man’s body is also called the “ervah.” Ervah comes the word ra – “evil”. Pleasure can be good or evil.

This, if a person has a true love for whom he is having pleasure with, then he has oneg, the right kind of pleasure, because his pleasure is coming together with genuine love for the other. But if a person just has a mere desire for the other person, but not genuine love, then whatever pleasure he has with the other is evil.

***The Purpose of Pleasure is to Enable Connection***

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The superficial kind of pleasure, *nega*, is the kind of pleasure where a person feels, “I am receiving pleasure.” But the true kind of pleasure is when a person feels that he is connected to a Source, to be connected to Hashem – like the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes about serving Hashem, “to take pleasure upon Hashem.” Pleasure is good and holy whenever it is used as a way for me to connect better with whom I’m trying to connect to.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* says that we were created to bask in the spiritual pleasure of enjoying the *Shechinah*. What does this mean? This doesn’t mean that a person wants to “get” enjoyment from the *Shechinah*. If desiring the *Shechinah* would be the same as desiring something physical, only that we have changed the address of our pleasure, then pleasure from the *Shechinah* would in essence be no different than desiring a physical pleasure.

Rather, desiring to bask in the pleasure of the *Shechinah* means that one wants to connect himself to the *Shechinah*. He’s not in it for the pleasure; he wants to have an actual connection with the *Shechinah*, and pleasure of course results from this, but he’s not doing it for the sake of the pleasure.

Thus, if a person wants to simply “take” pleasure from his relationship with Hashem, and that is why he serves Hashem, then his pleasure is not *oneg*, and it instead resembles *nega*, the evil and unhealthy kind of pleasure.

Without pleasure, it would be impossible to connect to anything. Pleasure helps us connect to what we should be connected to. That is the purpose of pleasure, and that is why we should use it. If we use pleasure as a tool to connect to what we want to connect to, it is *oneg*. If pleasure is used as a goal unto itself, it becomes evil and unhealthy – *nega*.

The *sefer* Eglai Tal writes that “a person must enjoy learning Torah, and even though a person enjoys is still enjoying it, it is still considered learning *Lishmah*.” But this is only true if a person is enjoying his learning in order to connect to the Torah. If a person is just learning for the enjoyment, then of course this is not considered learning *Lishmah*, even according to the words of the Eglai Tal.

Our life is really full of connections. All the *mitzvos* we have are essentially 613 different connections we must have with Hashem. The connection deepens with the more pleasure we have.

When we learn Torah, we are more connected to our learning with the more pleasure we have in it. The more we want to learn shows how much pleasure we have in it, and this deepens our bond with the Torah. But if a person just learns Torah and he doesn’t really want it, he has no pleasure in his learning, and his connection to the Torah will be very weak as a result.

The purpose of Creation is so that we can reach a true connection to Hashem. In order to connect, we need pleasure. So life is really all about pleasure – the right kind of pleasure. All of our *bechirah*, our free will to choose right from wrong, is essentially to choose which pleasure we want to have – the good kind of pleasure (pleasure as a means for connection to spirituality) or evil pleasure (pleasure for the sake of pleasure).

Thus, we must find pleasure in anything we are involved in that’s good, in order for us to connect to that good.

***Lasting Pleasure Only Comes from Water, Not Earth***

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Most people are not utilizing their element of water in the soul enough. They are only living with their element of earth - which Adam was cursed with after he sinned, “Dirt you are, and to dirt you will return.” Since most



people are only in touch with their element of earth and not enough with their element of water, most people do not have true pleasure on this world. They are lacking water in their souls.

By utilizing our element of water in the soul, our life can become full of true pleasure, the pleasure in serving Hashem. Most people are only experiencing pleasure from time and time, and not often enough. The pleasure that we do experience is only from the water rooted in earth, which is a dry kind of water – like desert water, which is black and dirty. It's evil pleasure. When we get pleasure from this source – with whatever “water” that our “earth” has to offer us – what happens? We get thirstier. It will just give us a desire for even more pleasure, because we are left unquenched. But when a person utilizes his element of water in the soul, he can experience true pleasure, as ongoing basis, all the time.

When Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge, he essentially fell from his level of true pleasure to evil, false pleasure. Ever since the sin, our lives have become mixed up of healthy and unhealthy pleasure at once. Most of us are therefore only using our earth element in the soul, and so we don't have constant pleasure - only sometimes (and even that pleasure isn't so real).

There are people who spend their whole day in pleasure, of course, but this is evil.

What indeed is true pleasure? Pleasure comes from our element of water in the soul. Just like water has nothing to hold it with, and we cannot take water in our hands, so is pleasure not possible for us to “take.” So if we want real pleasure, we cannot look to “take” pleasure; that is just desire and lust. Only if our intention is not to take, but to form a connection through the pleasure, can the pleasure be good and healthy.

The Torah is called “water” – as the Sages say, “There is no water except Torah.” Why is this so? It is because the Torah is what we connect ourselves to. It is the ultimate pleasure which we must come to love. But that is only true when we are indeed using the Torah as a way to connect to Hashem. If we just want to enjoy the Torah, without trying to connect to Hashem through our learning, it is not real pleasure - because it is pleasure without the goal of connecting, which cannot be real pleasure.

### ***Taking A Look At Our Friendships***

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In our own friendships, this concept is very relevant as well. If a person just wants to receive pleasure from his friends, then he will have no genuine friendships. But if a person really wants to have a connection with his friend, this is true friendship, and he will also end up enjoying the friendship as a result.

To clarify, pleasure is meant for us to use as a tool to connect to others with, but connection should never be used a tool to have a desire for something, because then it's not about connection anymore. We have to make sure not to mix up our goal of our connections.

If you want to have true friendships with others, ask yourself the following: When you are friends with someone, what is more important to you – the enjoyment you get out of it, or the actual connection that you share with the other? If you only love someone because of the pleasure you get out of him, then as soon as you stop enjoying the friendship, the friendship will one day disappear. As *Chazal* say, “Love that is dependent on something does not last.”

Although you get pleasure out of your relationships, your actual motivation should be in the bond you have with the other, not what you are getting out of it.

## 033 | *Eliminating Envy*

### *The depth of envy*

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The third bad middah which comes from the element of water is *chemdah* (envy).

Envy is not only a bad middah, but it is openly prohibited in the Torah – “You shall not covet your friend’s wife.” We are not allowed to covet another’s wife or possessions.

The Sages say that there are two things that a person has a natural envy for: stealing and adultery. There are two kinds of envy – an envy for money, and an envy for adultery.

The depth behind envy is when a person actualizes his desire. We see from the *Halacha* that if one steals something but pays the person back, he is liable for coveting, but if he steals and doesn’t pay it back, he is liable for the prohibition of stealing. What is the difference between stealing and coveting?

When a person steals, he is only desiring the monetary value of something; thus, he steals it entirely and doesn’t pay it back. But when a person steals something and gives the person back its worth in money – he only wanted the item he stole, not its value.

When a person envies something, he wants the actual thing he envies and nothing more. When he steals it, he is guilty for the prohibition of envy – because he has actualized his desire. He has taken something beyond him and made it into a part of himself, which is evil.

The depth of envy is that a person wants to take something he desires and have it all for himself, so he takes it.

### *How envy can be good*

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When is it good to have envy, and when is it evil?

*Eretz Yisrael* is called “Eretz Chemdah” – a land of envy. This is the good kind of envy – why?

Envy can be good if one wants to benefit only partially from what he wants. But when a person wants something in its entirety – like someone who steals an item – his envy is evil, because he wants it all.

This is the depth behind why Moshe was not allowed into *Eretz Yisrael*. Although it is good to desire *Eretz Yisrael* – and *Eretz Yisrael* is indeed a “land of envy” – that is only when a person wants to simply benefit from it, but not if the person wants it in all its entirety. Moshe wanted more than to simply benefit from *Eretz Yisrael* partially – he wanted all of it. For this, he wasn’t allowed into *Eretz Yisrael*.

We are supposed to desire and want *Eretz Yisrael*, but not because we should want to have it, but so that we can benefit from it alone. This can only be if we want to become like a tool in order to benefit from it (and not more than that). If we want anything more than this – like if we want it to be totally ours – such a desire is incorrect; it is *chemdah*. We need to desire *Eretz Yisrael* in the right way, which is by being merely a tool for it.

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Another kind of good envy we are supposed to have is toward the Torah – we should envy the Torah. But this envy is good only if we want to become a tool that will accept the Torah, so we can benefit from it – and not because we just want to have it. If we just want to have it, that is evil envy. But if we want to become a tool and a container that will be able to accept it, that shows we are interested in benefitting from the Torah, which is the good kind of envy to have.

How do we become a tool for *Eretz Yisrael*, and for learning the Torah? *Emunah* is the tool that can hold everything!

## 034 | *Eliminating Jealousy*

### *The Difference Between Jealousy and Hatred*

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The fourth middah which comes from the element of water in the soul is *kinah* (jealousy). The Sages say that a person is able to transform his jealousy of someone into love. This shows us that when a person is jealous of someone, he doesn't love him.

Being jealous of someone isn't the same thing as hating him. Hatred comes from the element of earth in the soul, while jealousy comes from the water in the soul. What is the difference between jealousy and hatred? They both don't love the other person, so why they are not the same thing?

When a person hates someone, he wants to destroy the other person. But when a person is jealous of another, he doesn't want to get rid of him, he just wants to lower him. That is the difference; we will elaborate on this.

### *Evil Jealousy and Good Jealousy*

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There are two kinds of jealousy: evil jealousy, as well as jealousy which is holy and good. The holy kind of jealousy is called *kinas sofrim* (jealousy of a Torah scholar). What is the difference between regular jealousy and *kinas sofrim*?

Jealousy is evil when a person it's personal. Let's say Reuven is jealous of Shimon, because Shimon is on a loftier level in spirituality than he is. This isn't *kinas sofrim*; it's plain jealousy (even though it is a jealousy for spiritual reasons, that doesn't make it *kinas sofrim*!). Why is Reuven jealous of Shimon? It is because in Reuven's mind, Shimon has taken Reuven's rightful place. He isn't really jealous over Shimon's actual accomplishments; he is simply upset that Shimon is supposed to be lower than him, and he is supposed to be higher than him.

But if Reuven would have *kinas sofrim*, he would be jealous of Shimon's actual accomplishment; with such a jealousy, he wants to really be where Shimon is, not to take away Shimon from his place.

The Sages said that there are two people whom no one is jealous of: A father of his son, and a Rebbi for his student. If not for this fact, there would really be a natural jealousy, even for one's own child or student! This is because it is possible that the father feels like the child is taking his place.

The brothers were jealous of Yosef, because they felt that he was taking away their place. Rochel was jealous of Leah, because when she saw Leah having more children, she felt that Leah had taken her place as Yaakov's main wife. This is the depth behind jealousy; to feel that the other person has taken my rightful place.

The Mishnah in Avos states that "Kinas sofrim increases wisdom." Only this kind of jealousy gives wisdom; why? Because with *kinas sofrim*, a person really wants to be on the other person's high level – and this inspires him to get there.

But with regular jealousy, the person just wants that the other person should be knocked down from where he is.

Jealousy is rooted in water in our soul. We mentioned earlier that there are two kinds of water in the soul – the Upper Waters, which are good, and the Lower Waters, which are evil. *Kinas sofrim* comes from the Upper Waters in the soul, while all other jealousy comes from the Lower Waters in the soul. The Lower Waters seek to lower the Higher Waters and to take their place, just like they quarreled on the second day of Creation; that is evil jealousy.

The Snake was also jealous of Adam and Chavah; the Midrash says that he saw them during marital relations and became jealous of their relationship. The snake was the first person to be jealousy – and all jealousy is rooted in the snake’s sin.

### ***The Cause for Jealousy: Feeling that the other is “more”***

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What is the root of jealousy?

For this, let us examine the brothers’ jealousy of Yosef. Yosef also means to “increase”; this shows us that when a person feels that the other is “more” than him, that results in jealousy. The brothers thought that Yosef that he was taking their rightful place and that he was “more” than them, so they were jealous of him.

Yehuda especially was jealous, because he felt like Yosef was trying to take away his status as king.

The Sages say that “jealousy makes the bones rot.” When a person is jealous and seeks to bring a person down, he himself is brought down. Yehuda, who was mainly responsible for the sale of Yosef as a result of his jealousy, was lowered from his status by the other brothers, after the events took place. Jealousy itself makes a person rot by bringing a person down.

### ***Defining Kinas Sofrim***

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We need to define *kinas sofrim*. *Kinas sofrim* doesn’t simply mean that one is “jealous” of another’s spiritual achievements. If a person wishes that the other person wouldn’t be better than him, his jealousy of another’s spiritual level is no different than the Snake’s jealousy of Adam and Chavah, who wished to bring them down from their spirituality.

### ***The first way to reach Kinas Sofrim: Emunah***

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True *kinas sofrim* that is good is reached either through one’s *Emunah*, when a person realizes that it is possible for both me and the other person to be on a high level. The person realizes that the other person’s high level is also within his ability, because he believes that everyone can reach such a level. The second way to reach *Kinas Sofrim*.

### ***Midas Hishtavus***

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Another way how *kinas sofrim* can be reached is through what is called *midas hishtavus*, “equalizing” -- to feel equal with another.

The second way, *midas hishtavus*, is a deeper method. A father cannot be jealous of his son, and a Rebbi cannot be jealous of his student. Why not? It is because there is an “equalizing” between them. A Rebbi and a student are able to be on the same level, like we see by a “talmid chever”, a “student who is a colleague.” Such a student is, in the Rebbi’s eyes, his equal.

When a person wants to equal with another, he has *kinas sofrim* with him and he comes wiser. This is the way to eliminate evil jealousy; with this thinking, a person doesn’t want to bring the other person down – he wants to be equal with him.

## 035 | *Cold Water in the Soul*

### ***Introduction***

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We continue here, with the help of Hashem, to learn about the element of water in the soul. In the previous chapters, we covered the traits which stem from the element of water in the soul, as listed by Rav Chaim Vital: *taavah* (desire), *taanug* (pleasure), *chemdah* (envy) and *kinah* (jealousy).

In addition to the *middos*/character traits which each of the four elements produce, there are also unique properties of each of the elements.

The unique property of water is that it is cold. As we mentioned earlier, fire is naturally hot, water is naturally cold, water is naturally moist, and earth is naturally dry. These are the four unique properties of each of the elements.

We are discussing here the element of water, which has the unique nature of being naturally cold. We will try to understand what this is in terms of how it applies to our soul.

### ***Good and Evil Kinds of “Coldness”***

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For everything that Hashem created, there is a way to use it for good or evil. Where do we find a good kind of coldness, and where do we find evil coldness?

The good kind of coldness is described in the possuk, “Cold waters on a famished soul.”<sup>266</sup> Water gives vitality, and when water is cold, it is especially revitalizing.

By contrast, evil coldness is written of Amalek, “*Asher korcha baderech*”, “They met you along the way”, and Rashi compares them to a person who jumps into a scalding bath, who gets burned but cools it off for others. [Amalek fought with the Jewish people and were defeated, but in doing so, they enabled other nations to lose fear of the Jewish people, so they “cooled off” the fear of other nations while they got burned in the process.]

The word *korcha* is related to the word *kerirus*, coldness, which hints to the evil trait of “coldness” that defines Amalek.

“Cold waters” in Hebrew are called *mayim karim*, which has the numerical value in Hebrew as the word *mes*, dead. In other words, the evil kind of coldness is associated with death.

Amalek attacked us when we were exhausted, and they did not fear Hashem. They were the evil kind of “cold waters” which exists in Creation to counter the holy kind of “cold waters”.

Death usually is associated with the element of earth, as we learned about earlier; “To earth you shall return” was the curse of death.<sup>267</sup> But there is also death which stems from the element of water. Death stemming from earth is

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<sup>266</sup> *Mishlei*: 25

physical death, death of the body, which places the body in the earth; whereas death stemming from water is spiritual death, a “death” to the soul.

The episode of the “bitter waters” at Merivah was what brought about the death of Moshe, who was “drawn from the water”; Moshe came from water, and his death was caused by water. The “bitter waters” at Merivah represent the evil kind of “cold waters”, the kind that brings death.

Thus, there is water which brings vitality, and there are waters which bring about death. The waters which brought life were the waters that saved Moshe’s life, while the waters which caused death were the Waters of Merivah.

We will soon bring more examples in which death to the soul is related to water.

The root of machlokes (strife) began on the second day of Creation, when Hashem separated the upper waters from the lower waters; on that day, Gehinnom was created. The connection is that the separation of the waters is what allowed for Gehinnom! Earth is death to the body, while water can bring death to the soul.

When a person is contaminated by a corpse, the Torah requires him to be purified through “mayim chaim”, pure spring water. Here again we see that water is associated with death.

“Cold waters on a famished soul” – what exactly is the person famished from? His soul is famished because he is exhausted, which is a kind of sleep, and sleep is called “a sixtieth of death” according to the Sages. Tiredness can be defined as a pull towards sleepiness; simply speaking, when a person feels sleepy, he is really feeling deathlike. Sometimes the body sleeps, but sometimes the soul sleeps, in the form of exhaustion. What takes the soul out of its tiredness? The “cold waters” that are poured on the soul, the mayim chaim, can revitalize a person and take him out of his lethargy.

Thus, the good and holy kind of “cold water” is when “cold water” gives life to the soul, while the evil kind of “cold water” is the root of death to the soul. We see this from the fact that coldness implies a lack of vitality, because heat is what gives vitality; when a person is alive, his body is warm, but when a person is dead, his body is cold. Death stemming from water is coldness of the soul.

Until now, we explained coldness of water – it can either be a source of vitality-giving energy to a famished soul, as the possuk says; or it can be a death to the soul.

### ***The Connection Between Keri/Spilled Seed and Kerirus/Coldness***

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There are two kinds of water which exit the body: the bris Kodesh, the reproductive organ, contains two passageways, one of which brings zera (human seed), which brings life to the world (through enabling holadah/birth); and the other is the urinary tract. The urine is the pesoles (disposable parts) of water.

When holadah (the reproductive process) is carried out in its pure form, life is brought to the world. The continuation of life is enabled through the droplet of zera. When this droplet doesn’t exit through the proper way, though, it is called keri (emission), from the word kerirus, coldness.



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When zera is used for holadah, the zera is warm, but when it exits as keris, the zera is cold. This is the ruination of water. Urine is hot, while the misuse of holadah is keris, from the word kerirus.

In other words, the kerirus of keris, which brings death, has become manifest in this place that could have brought life to the world, because souls could have been created from this droplet, as the Sages reveal; thus, keris is like a death to the souls of these unborn children.

So death to the soul comes from water: through keris. The droplet of zera of keris could have been a source of life, had it been used for holadah; when it isn't used for holadah, when it is not used for holiness, it becomes keris. It is like a death – and what kind of death? Not death to the body, but a death to the soul.

So on one hand, water can be mayim chaim, “waters of life”, in which the coldness of water brings vitality; or it becomes the mayim karim (cold waters) of keris, in which the coldness of water brings spiritual death.

### *Coldness Is Holy When It Is Used To Mitigate Between Two Opposites*

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Now that we have defined the good and evil kinds of coldness, we will reflect into what kind of coldness brings life, and what kind of coldness brings death. It is not the same kind of coldness. We will try to understand this and give some examples that illustrate the concept.

Everything in Creation has an opposite. The opposite of coldness is heat. Water is cold, and fire is hot.

There is always a middle point between two opposites. What is the middle point between cold and heat?

The simple understanding is that in between cold and heat, there is a level in between, which is “poisher”, lukewarm. We see that there is such a thing as “mayim poshim”, lukewarm water.

However, we do not find this term mentioned explicitly in the words of our Sages. In the words of our Sages, we find a different term for the middle point in between cold and heat: the word “revayah”, which is the level in between heat and cold.

These are two ways to describe the middle point that is in between cold and heat. What is the difference?

The element in between water and fire is wind. Wind is moist and hot, which contains properties of both water and fire, because water is moist and fire is hot. We also find that earth is in between fire and water.

Revayah is from the word ruach/wind, so when wind is used as the middle point in between fire/heat and water/coldness, it is known as revayah. The other term for the middle point between fire and water, poisher, is a use of the element of earth.

What is the difference? They are two kinds of middle points. One kind of middle point is a point which contains a little of each of the opposite, such as lukewarm water, poisher, which contains elements of both heat and coldness. But another kind of middle point is when the opposites are connected to their root. A simple example of is the connection of husband and wife, two opposites, which are connected together, for the sake of holadah.

So revayah is a middle point that connects two opposite points together, while poisher/earth can contain both opposites, but it cannot balance the opposites together.

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Thus, there are two ways to mitigate between cold and heat: revayah (wind) and poisher (earth). The difference is that wind can connect both fire and water to their root, while earth can contain them together, but it cannot connect them to their root.

What kind of “cold water” brings life, and what kind of “cold water” brings death?

When a soul is “famished”, that means that it has become dry inside, from fire in the soul. When “cold water” is poured upon the soul, the soul becomes balanced, and the person receives vitality from this. The “cold water” revitalizes the soul because it balances the soul – it harmonizes the fire with the water in the soul. Such water is life-giving.

Coldness that brings death, however, is when the soul’s abilities are mixed together, but they do not become harmonized and balanced. To illustrate, snow is cold; earlier, we brought from the words of the Sages that earth was created from snow, which is hardened water. Snow is called kerach, which stands for kor (cold) revayah (mitigation) chom (heat). However, the coldness of kerach/snow does not unify the opposite elements of fire and water. It mixes the three elements together (water, wind and fire), but it does not harmonize them.

When does coldness give life, and when does it give death? If it brings balance to the soul, it gives life. If it brings extremes, it does not bring life.

Snow is the extreme form of water, because snow cannot be drunk; it must be melted. Snow itself cannot give vitality to a person. It represents a mixing of the elements which are unbalanced. By contrast, the good kind of coldness is when coldness brings a person to a middle point, to a balance between two opposites. When coldness brings balance, it is life-giving. But when coldness is just by itself and it does not foster any kind of connection, it brings death.

“Cold water” gives life when a person has dryness in his soul and he is leaning towards a deathlike situation in his soul, and the “cold waters” are poured upon him which revitalize him, by essentially giving balance to his soul’s abilities.

So when coldness is by itself, it brings death; when it brings balance, when it connects the opposite points to their root, it brings life.

We can see this too from our physical world, that coldness by itself cannot provide life: people cannot live in places in the world that are too cold [Such as in the North or South Poles]. But when coldness provides a balance between two opposing points, the cold then becomes life-giving.

This is the meaning of “cold waters on a famished soul”, how coldness can actually give life.

Where can we find the root of this concept of cold water?

On the second day of Creation, Hashem made a separation between the upper waters and the lower waters. The upper waters remained in Heaven, while the lower waters are on earth. We know that the nature of fire is to rise, and water naturally drops downwards. The word shomayim, the heavens, is a combination of the words aish/fire and mayim/water, because Heaven can contain both of them properly.

How can water and fire be combined? Through a revayah, a mitigating force. When coldness comes from a revayah, this represents the upper waters, which can combine with fire, for they are in Heaven, in which water and fire are combined. But the lower waters, which drop to the earth, are essentially waters that are connected with

death, to the death in the earth. This is not a coldness that harmonizes fire with water, but a coldness which brings death; this is coldness rooted in earth.

Thus, cold waters can also be a source of death, but if coldness fosters connection, the coldness then acts as a catalyst for life. It is only when coldness is by itself and it doesn't harmonize with anything else that it brings death.

The *Gemara* mentions that a donkey is always cold, even during even the hot month of Tamuz. A donkey is chamor in Hebrew, from the word choimer/materialism. The element of earth is known for its choimer, (as the Maharal discusses at length). The coldness of the donkey represents the deathlike kind of coldness, for even in Tamuz it is cold, because its coldness is always by itself, and it never gets balanced.

How can we know the difference between evil and good coldness? It is based on the above.

Evil coldness is keris, which is also known as pgam bris, damaging the Holy Covenant.

When zera is used for holiness, for holadah, it is called *da'as*, which causes connection between husband and wife; "Vayeda Adam es Chavah", "And Adam knew his wife", meaning, he knew her and become connected to her, through their marital relations.

But when the zera is used for itself and not to achieve connection with a wife, when it is not used for holadah (procreation), it becomes the evil kind of kerirus/coldness.

Keris is called mikreh layoh, a nocturnal emission. It seems to come from bodily heat, not from kerirus. If so, why is it called keris (from the word kerirus), when it is clearly not cold? But the understanding is that it although it comes from heat of the body, it is not a heat which led to any connection, therefore, even heat can be a kind of coldness. When heat doesn't cause connection like it should, it is really a form of kerirus/coldness.

The Hebrew words for cold and heat, kar and cham, is equal in numerical value to the word someach, joy. In other words, there is simcha/joy when there is a balance between opposites.

The soul can either be apart from others, or be unified with others. We have the choice to decide if we will use the power of kerirus to bring about connection - or disparity.

### *The Evil Coldness of Amalek*

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When coldness is to itself and it does not cause about any connection, it is keris. This was the kerirus of Amalek. They attacked us at Refidim, which is from the word pirud, disparity.

When a person gets burned, what does he do? He sticks his hands into cold water. The nation of Amalek, who "jumped" into the scalding bath (and got burned) cooled it off for others. Why didn't Amalek also get cooled off from its own water that it jumped into? It is because the coldness of Amalek always remains as coldness, and it cannot be mitigated. Its coldness always remains to itself, unable to be balanced. Amalek is a coldness that can never be rectified.

To make this concept simpler, we can understand that when someone doesn't want to connect with people, he is called a "cold person." Evil coldness is pirud (disparity), from the word Refidim, where Amalek attacked us; the coldness of Amalek is by itself and it does not become mitigated. By contrast, the holiness of the Jewish people can connect with each other, as we were all with one heart at Har Sinai.

***The Depth of Evil Coldness: Extreme Contraction***

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In other language from our Rabbis, heat in the soul causes expansion in the soul, while coldness in the soul causes contraction in the soul. Coldness does not just cause a lack of connection with another; it also causes a person to contract into himself even more. Until now, we explained how coldness causes a lack of connection to another. But in addition, coldness also causes contraction.

Returning to the discussion about Amalek, we have a mitzvah to erase Amalek, which is called mechiyas Amalek; the word mechiyah is from the word chom, heat. The depth of this mitzvah is that Amalek got burned and cooled it off for others, and the coldness of Amalek causes it to contract into itself. The simpler understanding is that we erase them through “erasing” them, mechiyah, from the word cham/heat. But the deeper understanding is that we can also erase them through their coldness, for it is their coldness that acts self-destructive to them. Why? Since coldness causes inward contraction, Amalek is so cold that it keeps contracting into itself, until it will eventually destroy itself.

Kerirus is also from the word mikreh, “happenstance.” Mikreh is when something has no connection to the previous event. Amalek is like mikreh, and this we explained earlier. But Amalek is also kerirus, which is that not only is there no connection to others, but it destroys itself, by contracting into itself too much.

Sometimes the weather is cold and sometimes it is hot. There is winter and summer. In between these two points are the elements of wind and earth. Between winter and summer is spring, and between summer and winter is the fall. This reflects the concept here, that the cold has to be mitigated through the other elements. But when kerirus is by itself (unlike what we are used to, when we have both summer and winter in the year), the cold is destructive, for it is unbalanced.

This is the depth behind the concept of Amalek, who will really be destroyed by itself [in the future], from its own coldness.

***Holy Coldness: Cooling Off Extreme Enthusiasm***

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In clearer language that applies to our soul, there are two kinds of coldness in our soul – when a person doesn’t connect to others, and when a person contracts into himself. When a person doesn’t connect to others, he is missing a balance. He needs a kind of coldness that will enable him to be balanced. This we have addressed so far.

When a person has too much fire in his soul – when he has too much enthusiasm – he is also off balance. He needs to use coldness in the soul to balance himself out, so that his “fire” will be cooled off a bit. The function of coldness in the soul is so that we can use it to give balance to the soul; it is not meant to remain as itself. [When coldness remains as itself, it is evil. Its purpose is so that we can use it to balance out the soul when there is too much heat].

When a person is too enthused, he needs “cold water” to put out the inner fire that has gotten too dominant. We see this from the following: when a person feels an evil desire, the Rabbis wrote that he should stand in cold water, which cools off the heat of his desire. This is practical advice which our Rabbis gave, but beyond this use as well, a person can also use “cold water” in the soul to cool off his extreme enthusiasm (even when he doesn’t feel an evil desire), by attaining a balance to his soul’s abilities.

In simpler words: we have a heart and intellect. The heart is the root of our element of fire, and our intellect is the root of our element of water. When a person has too much “heart” – when he has too much enthusiasm – he needs to cool off his fire in his heart, by using his cold intellect. This is the holy kind of kerirus, which can balance the heart.<sup>268</sup>

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***Using Holy Coldness To Cool Off Evil Desires***

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That was one practical use of cold water in the soul. Another practical use pertains to the fact that coldness causes contraction in the soul, just as Amalek’s coldness will destroy itself.

*Chazal*<sup>269</sup> say that the male organ, the more it is seemingly “satisfied” through the act of intimacy, the more it causes one to be hungry for even more (intimacy), but when it is starved, it is actually satisfied. How is it starved? When one “satisfies” it, this is using the heat of his soul, and such heat is evil; it needs to be cooled off. When one starves it, by not giving in to its desire, he is essentially using the coldness of the soul, and for a holy purpose. It satisfies the person because the person weakens the desire and comes to not need it. The desire is lessened with the more that the coldness of the soul is applied. [This is how coldness in the soul can be used for holiness: it can be used to cool off the heat of desire, which gives balance to the soul.]

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***The Deepest Form of Holy Coldness: The Non-Movement Which Reveals Hashem***

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On a deeper note, there is also a holy power of coldness in the soul. The holy kind of coldness is when there is no movement. When there is heat, there is movement, as we see that an alive person is moving. Coldness produces a lack of movement. This is a power that can be used for either good or evil.

So altogether, there are three aspects to coldness: 1) Lack of connection, 2) Contraction, and 3) Lack of movement. The earth also contains non-movement, and this is related to the coldness of earth which brings death. But coldness of water also contains non-movement. Before it was separated, all water in the world was not moving.

This represents the perfected kind of non-movement in cold water. On the first day, when the water was non-moving, there was nothing besides Hashem; this was the perfected kind of coldness. The perfected kind of coldness is when Hashem fills the entire world, and there is no other movements. “There is no place empty from Him”<sup>270</sup> really refers to this holy kind of coldness. When all desire for movement is silenced, this reveals the holy kind of non-movement.

When Amalek will be destroyed, its coldness will be destroyed and reveal the perfected kind of coldness, which is that Hashem will fill the entire world, and there will be no other movements.

The kerirus of water, at its holy root, reveals Hashem in the world. The perfected bond with Hashem is really found in this perfected kerirus! These words are describing the purpose of Creation. It is the purpose of why Amalek needs to be erased, and in its place, to reveal the holy and perfected kind of coldness.

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<sup>268</sup> For more on this concept and how to apply it practically, see *Getting To Know Your Feelings-Chapter 17*, and *Tefillah #0107-Balance In Your Avodas Hashem*.

<sup>269</sup> *Sukkah 52a*

<sup>270</sup> *Zohar*

We have explained the three uses of coldness in the soul. May we merit from the Creator to receive from the Creator the Torah, in perfect acceptance.

דע את מידותיך מהות המדות 036 מים - מי רגלים

## 036 | *Water – Bodily Fluids*

### *Part 1: The Urinary and Reproductive Faculties*

#### *Studying The Bodily Fluids On A Deeper Level*

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In the previous chapter, we learned about the reproductive faculty, which is rooted in the element of water in the soul. Now we will learn about the “offspring” of water [the bodily fluids].

*Chazal*<sup>271</sup> teach (in the laws regarding liquids that can receive tum’ah, spiritual defilement) that not only can water be defiled, but even the “offspring” of water can be defiled: the fluid of the eyes (tears), the fluid of the ears (ear fluid), and the liquid of the mouth (saliva), and the fluid of “between the legs” (urine).

The eyes, ears, and mouth are on the face, which is on the head and connected to the skull, which is the source of the senses: sight (in the eyes), hearing (the ears), smell (the nose), and taste (the mouth). The fluids which stem from these parts of the body are called the “offspring” of water, and they can become defiled through tum’ah. This group of “offspring of water” is present in the upper section of the body, the skull; a second group of “offspring of water” is present in the lower section of the body, which is the urine.

Therefore, there are two groups of “offspring of water”: in the skull [the fluids of the eyes, ears, nose and mouth], and in the lower section of the body, “between the legs” [the urine].

#### *The “Higher Waters” and “Lower Waters” of the Body*

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Let us see the parallel here with the four elements of fire, wind, water and earth.

*Chazal* attribute the four elements as having their main place in one of the sections of the body. The element of fire is attributed to the head, the element of wind to the middle section of the body (the torso), and the element of water to the lower section of the body (from the liver and down). “Fire” is in the highest place (the head), “water” is on bottom (below the liver)<sup>272</sup> and “wind” is in between them (the middle section of the body).<sup>273</sup>

We find that in the six days of Creation, Hashem split the waters, into the upper waters and the lower waters. The upper waters are therefore closer to fire [Heaven] and are connected with it, whereas the lower waters are found below on this earth. The “skies”, or rekia (the firmament) which separate the “lower” and “higher” waters, is essentially the air (wind). That is a brief description of this matter.

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<sup>271</sup> Tractate Machshirin 5:6

<sup>272</sup> Editor’s Note: Water of the body is the urinary and reproductive faculties, which are in the lower section of the body.

<sup>273</sup> Editor’s Note: “Wind”, which is air, is parallel to the respiratory system, which is in the middle section of the body (the heart and lungs).

Just as there are “lower” and “higher” waters in the side of holiness, so are there “higher waters” and “lower waters” in the body, both of them being holy: the “higher waters” are in the head, in the brain, and the “lower waters” are in the lower section of the body. The holy “higher waters” are in the brain, which can house holiness [the power of holy thought], and there are also holy “lower waters” in the lower section of the body.

The same is true for the side of impurity: there also impure “higher waters”, and impure “lower waters”. This is what *Chazal* mean that there are bodily fluids which can become susceptible to defilement (tumah). The fluid of the eyes, ears, and mouth are the impure “higher waters” in the body. The fluid of “in between the legs”, urine, which can also become defiled, is the impure “lower waters” of the body.

In summary, the “higher waters” and “lower waters” of the body exist both in the side of holiness as well as in the side of impurity. Here we will try to understand the lower waters of the body which are “in between the legs”, the urine, which are the impure “lower waters”.

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### ***The Relationship Between the Urinary and Reproductive Faculties***

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The *Gemara*<sup>274</sup> says that there are two “pipes” in the body which release the lower bodily fluids: the reproductive faculty, which releases bodily fluid that enable reproduction, and the urinary tract, from which urine is released. The *Gemara* says that there is almost nothing separating these pipes from each other, and if a person strains this area by withholding urination, the fluid in the urinary tract can leak into the reproductive tract and it can cause infertility.<sup>275</sup>

In the times of the *Gemara*, withholding urination was endangering to the body and it could cause infertility. The *Gemara* says that there were a few students who became infertile because they didn’t want to leave the room when their teacher was delivering the shiur, and since they withheld from urinating, they became infertile as a result. Therefore, the *Gemara* permits urinating in public if one has no other alternative, due to the danger that can result from withholding urination.

The *Gemara*<sup>276</sup> says that normally one should urinate in a modest fashion, “in a fence within a fence, in a cave within a cave.” As an ideal course of action, urination must be done discreetly and modestly, but if there is a danger to the body, the *Gemara* permits urinating in public, and although this goes against modesty, in such a case, modesty is outweighed, in favor of enabling reproduction.

These are the two pipes within the body: the reproductive tract, and the urinary tract. The reproductive faculty is entirely about “Yisrael is holy”, for “Yisrael does this act (of enabling reproduction) in a modest fashion”, it is an act which is entirely done in modesty. But urination, while ideally requiring a modest fashion, must be done even in an immodest fashion, if it will prevent reproduction. From the fact that Sages permitted urinating in public when there is no alternative – which the Sages said very clearly - it is apparent that urination must be done even if it will be completely immodest.

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274 *Bechoros 44a*

275 *Editor’s Note: The Poskim explain that this was only the case in the times of the Gemara, and is no longer applicable in our times, for “the nature of the physical body has undergone changes” since in the times of the Gemara. We can see today that withholding urination does not cause infertility.*

276 *Berachos 62a*

*Water Enters The Body Modestly, and Exits The Body Immodestly*

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First let us understand the simple meaning of this matter. In the words of the *Gemara* quoted above, the Sages state that one should not drink water in public, but when it comes to urination, if he must urinate and he has nowhere discreet to go, he may urinate in public. Drinking is the way in which one receives water, and urination is the way water is released from him. When a person drinks, the water enters the mouth, which is on the face, connected to the skull, the highest part of the body.

Although the body's water/fluids can also be released from the eyes, ears, and nose, the main place in the body where water is released from is the reproductive organ, the place in the body where the "Bris Kodesh" is stamped upon. That is where the water of the body leaves and goes outward, and when it leaves, it leaves from a low place in the body. Water enters a high place in the body, the mouth, and leaves from the low place in the body, the reproductive and excretory system.

Water must enter the body discreetly, for one is not allowed to drink water publicly, and although it should also leave the body in a discreet manner, it may leave the body even in an indiscreet manner, when one is in an endangering situation. But water enters a higher place in the body and is released from a lower place of the body. Even in the higher place of the body where it enters, there can also be excrement of the body, for the eyes, nose, ears and mouth all produce excess fluids, but the main place of the body where excess fluids are excreted are in the lower section of the body.

The *Gemara* says that when davening, one must distance himself from urine, but one is not required to distance himself from the urine of a child when davening. What is the difference? A child has no *da'as* (understanding) yet. The tum'ah (spiritual defilement) in urine, which we may not pray in front of, is essentially because it is excess fluid of the brain that gets sent downward into the body. Therefore, only in an adult, who has *da'as*, is urine regarded as the excess fluid of the brain that is impure. But in a child, who has no *da'as* to begin with, the urine is not regarded as coming from the brain, because he has no *da'as*.

When water enters the body, it is in the mouth, connected to the head, which contains the brain, which has wisdom and *da'as*. These are the "higher waters" of the body, and of this it said, "Thirsty for water", which refers to the "water" that is Torah (water is also linked with wisdom in many places in the words of *Chazal*).

But since a person's *da'as* has become a mixture of good and evil ever since partaking of the evil *da'as* of the Eitz HaChaim Da'as Tov V'Ra, the water in the body becomes excess fluid of the brain. This is the depth behind distancing oneself from urine while praying. Urine is the excess, impure fluid of the brain, which must be released from the body.

The reproductive organ stems from a "droplet" in the brain, which is the holy fluid of the brain. The urinary tract, which releases this very fluid as well, is linked to this very same place. But the reproductive organ releases the brain's fluid in a way that is pure and holy – depending on how purified a person has become, and there are varying levels of how pure it can be; but in general, it enables reproduction, the continuation of life. Urine, however, is the excess and unnecessary fluids of the body.

Both urine and semen release the brain's fluids. Since urine also stems from the brain's fluids, and urine releases the impure fluids of the brain, urine really contains the "excess thoughts" of a person. This is because there is a mixture of evil *da'as* that enters the brain as a result from the Eitz HaDa'as Tov V'Ra, and this becomes excess fluid of the brain which needs to be released outward from the body.



***Machshavah/Thought and Medameh/Imagination***

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The Vilna Gaon and others said that there are two root mental powers of the brain: machshavah (thought) and medameh (imagination).

Within machshavah/thought, there is seichel iyuni (analytical thought), seichel hadibri (word-oriented thought), seichel hamaasi (action-oriented thought), while medameh/imagination contains seichel behami (“animalistic” intellect; immature thinking), which entered man since eating of the Eitz HaDa'as Tov V’Ra. The medameh, the imaginative thoughts that entered the brain since eating of the Eitz HaDa'as, is essentially the “ra” (evil) of the Eitz HaDa'as Tov V’Ra, while machshavah/thought is the “tov” (the good) in the Eitz HaDa'as Tov V’Ra.

We find that medameh-thoughts are released outward from the body, via the means of urination. (There is also higher medameh-thoughts that are purified, which the prophets reached, which is a holy form of medameh that doesn’t need to be rectified, hence, it does not need to be released. Here we are talking about lower, impaired medameh-thoughts, which need to be released). Thus, we can now understand that by distancing oneself from urine while praying, one distances himself from impaired medameh.

Urine is thus the release of the evil *da'as* contained in the Eitz HaDa'as Tov V’Ra, thus if one does not have *da'as* (such as a child), there is no requirement to distance oneself from such urine.

There is a subtle difference between two kinds of medameh: of the element of earth, and of the element of (impaired) water. There is earth-adamah-medameh (imagination rooted in the element of earth), and there is also impaired medameh rooted in the element of water. Earth is not one of the active elements, because it was formed from the snow which was formed from the water, earth is but a result of water. It is a changed form of water. Therefore, earth is not considered to be an active element. That is the “medameh” in the element of earth – to imagine something that does not exist – because earth really does not exist as its own reality.

Earth is nothing but a changed form of water. This is the “adamah”, the earth, that is “medameh”, the imagination – it does not exist in and of itself. It is an extension of water, not its own element, thus earth is associated with the imagination, for it is its own imagined reality.

***The Relationship Between Imagination and The Reproductive Process***

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For this reason, the reproductive process as well is affected by medameh/imagination. Without medameh, a person wouldn’t be able to start the process of marital intimacy.

Intimacy must be done at nighttime, a time where people go to sleep and have dreams, which is a time where imagination is active. Marital connection is called *da'as* (knowing, usually referred to as an intimate kind of knowledge), which includes the faculty of medameh/imagination, as well as machshavah/thought.

The totally impaired part of the medameh leaves the body through urination, whereas reproduction comes from a fusion of machshavah/thought and medameh/imagination. The person first thinks to engage in reproduction, and then he makes use of the imaginative faculty to further this process. In this way, the “refined” parts of medameh are put to use; whereas the totally “unrefined” parts of medameh leave the body through urination.

*Impaired Urination (Shoses/Trickling) - The Release of Impaired Imagination*

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The *Gemara* says that upon urinating, one should not let the drops trickle on his clothes, because it might cause others to think that he cannot bear children, which will make people that his children are not his own. The *Gemara* also says that if a person cannot bear children, the urination trickles (shoses/trickling), and if he can bear children, the urination is straight (kiluach). Thus, when someone has a problem with reproduction, his urine trickles, which is called “shoses” (trickling).

Reproduction is all about the concept of continuation. The word shoses/trickling from the word “shis”, which means 6, alluding to the 6 days of the week, which end with Shabbos. The depth behind the problem with urine that trickles, which symbolizes a lack of reproduction, is that there is no continuation. This current world is the 6,000 year period, which is also called medameh, the imagination, for in the future we will see that we are now “like dreamers”. Medameh is therefore like the concept of shoses/trickling, because it does not continue forever – it ends at some point.

We explained that reproduction is a result of two forces – machshavah/thought and medameh/imagination, the two abilities which are rooted in “b’tzalmeinu” (“In our image”) and “k’demuseinu” (“In our likeness”). If the “b’tzalmeinu” aspect is stronger, the “medameh” is rectified. If the “k’demuseinu” aspect is stronger, the machshavah (faculty of thought) falls to the level of medameh (imaginative thought), and these are the kinds of marital unions which the *Gemara* says results in a miscarriage.

On a deeper level, this is when the machshavah (the level of thought) falls into the level of medameh (the level of imaginative thought), which becomes like “shoses” – the droplet “trickles” downward, instead of being released in a straight line, which is called “kiluach”.

So there is the concept of “kiluach” (urination in a straight line), and the concept of “shoses” (urination that trickles). The urine is called “mei raglayim”, the waters of “between the feet” – it is associated with the feet, and the urine can either come through “kiluach” or through “shoses”.

Thus, the unrefined parts of medameh/imagination exit the body through the urine, the “lower waters” in the body. Medameh/imagination is essentially an unstable force, for when a person lives all the time with imaginative thoughts, he is spacing out all day, living in his fantasies, whereas machshavah/thought is a kind of thought that allows for concentration. Medameh/imagination in contrast, gives birth to another medameh, and another medameh, etc. They are like feet that keep walking without pause, which is an impaired kind of walking. Hence, the drops in the brain that are affected by medameh/imagination leave the body through urine, which are called “mei raglayim”, the waters of “between the legs”, referring to an impaired kind of “legs” that keep walking without stopping.

In contrast, machshavah (thought) is a stable kind of thought process, which is consistent, and “the secret of holiness is consistency.”<sup>277</sup> A Torah scholar thinks wherever he goes<sup>278</sup> – for thought is consistent. Thought is the upkeep of the existence of everything. The “legs” or “feet” of machshavah are a rectified kind of “legs” or “feet”, and therefore machshavah does not leave the body through mei raglayim [but through the reproductive process, which emits the refined parts of medameh/imagination along with machshavah/thought].

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<sup>277</sup> *Igros Chazon Ish*

<sup>278</sup> *Ramchal, in Derech Eretz Chaim*

## 201 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

When a person leaves the stable thinking process of machshavah, his mind immediately enters into the medameh, the imagination process, which then enters him into other things, and then to another thing, then to another thing, with no orderly thought. That is the nature of the imagination, which is an impaired thought process.

Thus, machshavah/thought is orderly, whereas medameh/imagination makes a person leave orderliness. The feet can keep going as long as they are walking on the ground, and they naturally follow the order of Creation, which is to keep walking, without interruption. But when a person leaves orderliness, this is called the “feet” of medameh (as opposed to the feet of machshavah), which are impaired. This is reflected by the act of eating from the Eitz HaDa'as, which made mankind enter into medameh/imagination, which removed Creation from its normal order and plan. Hence, medameh/imagination interrupts the orderly flow of things.

When a person sins, it is because a ruach shtus (spirit of folly), entered him<sup>279</sup>, which is really the force of medameh, the imagination. The word “shtus” (folly) is also related to the word “shoteh” (fool), and to the word “shoses” (trickling), an allusion to impaired urine. Whenever a person leaves chochmah/machshavah (wisdom/thought), he enters ruach shtus/shoteh/shoses/medameh.

This is the depth behind the concept of “mei raglayim” (urine, which is called the fluids of “between the feet”) – these are bodily fluids which have fallen to the level of the “feet” of medameh, they are the unrefined parts of the imagination, as opposed to the “feet” of machshavah/thought.

### *Urine – The Release and Rectification of Impaired Imagination*

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Earlier, it was explained based upon the words of the *Gemara* that water enters the body in a modest fashion (for one should not drink water in public), and it may exit immodestly (for one may urinate in public if he has no other alternative). It has been explained here that impaired medameh/imagination separates from machshavah/thought, by exiting the body, through urine – and when it does so, it exits in an immodest fashion.

Simply speaking, this is because in the way Hashem created a person, a person cannot hold in his urine for too long, so he must urinate even in public, and if he doesn't, he damages his reproductive faculty and he becomes infertile.

The deeper meaning of this, though, is because medameh/imagination (represented by urine) can only be revealed publicly, and that is when we see how it is entirely a non-reality.

### *Getting Rid of Imaginative Thoughts: Releasing Them Through Verbalization*

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This leads us to the following insight.

When a person is in middle of fantasizing about something, and he wants to stop imagining - if he keep the imaginative thoughts to himself, the imagination continues to thrive, for the imaginative thoughts remain afloat in the air, before they are released. As soon as he talks about the imaginative thoughts, there is “*da'as* is hidden in the lips”, the *da'as* contained in his power of speech can separate between the parts of the imagination that are stable

and the parts that are unstable. This is the simpler understanding of how verbalizing an imaginative thought can take away the fuel of the imagination.

The deeper understanding of how this works, though, is because medameh is revealed when it is released outward and it is made public. Medameh is built on non-existent images and expands upon them. Medameh is also rooted in earth; the role of earth is to reveal the potential of something, through the growth process. When imagination is released outward, it is revealed that it was nothing, a non-reality.

For example, if there is a dead fetus, it will seem to others that there is a person about to be born, but when it is born, it is revealed that this was an imagined reality, a medameh, because it becomes revealed to all that there was no living person here. It only appeared to be a living person, but when it comes out, it is revealed that it is not alive. Thus, as long as medameh is kept inside, it appears to have a reality. When it exits outward, it is revealed to all that it was a non-reality.

### *The Destruction of The Evil In Our Times*

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All of the evil in the world today, especially in our generation, is being released outward; its potential is being activated, it is being revealed out in the open. As long as the evil remains in its potential state, it only appears, to our imagination, that it has some substance to it; evil “appears” to have some reality to it, and we consider it as an existent force. But when we see the evil being released from its potential state and it becomes active, we then see how there is really no substance to it.

Thus, medameh [the root of all evil] can only exist as long as it remains in its potential state. When it is released totally, we see that it doesn’t exist and that it is a non-reality. Evil, or medameh, when it is released outward, ceases to exist. It only “exists” when it remains in its potential, imaginative state.

### *When Imagination Is Good, and When Imagination Is Evil*

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On a subtler level, in potential, imagination is good, but when it is activated, it is evil. If imagination is used on a “potential” level – i.e. when one knows that it is just a “potential” force in the soul of “imagination”, and it is not regarded as a reality - then it is good; but when used on an “active” level – like when one considers his imaginative thoughts to be real as if they are taking place in reality – only then does imagination become evil.<sup>280</sup>

### *In Conclusion*

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Thus, the body’s urine represents a rectification of the imagination: it releases the excess fluids that began in the brain which are impaired imaginative thoughts that stem from evil, and when “imagination” is released from its hidden, potential state into its active state, it is revealed to all as a non-reality. That is what rectifies the imagination.

## 066 | *Wind – The Root Of Speech*

### ***Introduction***

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Here is a short of introduction of what is to come.

Hashem created the world with four elements – fire, wind, water and earth. All creations consist of these elements, ever since the beginning of creation. This is true both in our physical components, as well as in our *middos* (character traits).

Although we have many, many *middos*, there are four roots to them, as Rav Chaim Vital explains. The four roots are the elements of fire, wind, water and earth.

Since our avodah is to fix and purify our *middos*, our main avodah is not merely to fix the *middos* themselves, but to learn about them at their root and recognize the roots, and after that we can see how they show up in our life. After that, and only after that, can we actually work to fix them.

Most people like to jump straight to the last step: How do I actually fix my *middos*? But the truth is that the *middos* have to be learned about in-depth, to see the matters at their root, and then you can see how to work with them.

So we will first see the roots of the matter. In all areas of Torah, the matters are always deep, because Torah is endless. If one wants to quickly get straight to the practical outcomes already, he won't be able to. We first need to understand, and then we can know how to improve what we want to improve in.

### ***Wind: The Root of The Four Elements***

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The four elements are fire, wind, water, and earth. We are up to discussing the element of wind.

Chazal say that wind was created first, and from it Hashem made water, from water Hashem made fire, and then He made earth from fire. So wind came first.

### ***Wind: The Root of Breathing, Speech, and Movement***

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Where is the wind manifest in us?

We are generally made up of three parts – our head, our stomach, and our torso. Fire is associated with our head, water is associated with our stomach, and wind is associated with our torso. Here we are focusing the discussion on wind. You breathe air through your lungs, which is in the middle section of your body. This is where wind is revealed in the body.

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Even more so, when life was breathed into man from Hashem, man is called *ruach memalelah* – a “talking spirit”. This is the main manifestation of *ruach*: in our mouth. There is also *ruach* in our nostrils – “*ruach apeinu*”. We can breathe through our mouth or nose.

Even more so, all our movements come from wind in us. Earth does not move, and water stays where it is; it can merely descend. Fire does not move, and it can only spread if it destroys things. Only wind can move on its own. Wind is the moving and motivating factor behind all things. The plants and stars are made from the material of earth, but wind is behind their orbit and keeping them revolving.

Rav Chaim Vital writes that the *middos* which stem from our element of wind in us are: the traits which involved our power of speech. There is holy speech as well as evil speech. Evil speech is *devarim betailim*, idle speech. So Rav Chaim Vital explains wind as mainly being in our mouth, our speech.

### ***Four Kinds of Idle Speech***

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*Devarim betailim* (idle speech) has four branches: *chanufah* (flattery), *sheker* (falsity), *lashon hora* (gossip), and *shevach atzmo* (bragging of one’s praises).

Our holy use of speech is used when we speak words of Torah, and the evil use of speech is when we speak any of these four kinds of evil speech. These are not all the same kind of evil speech - they are actually four different kinds of ‘winds’, just as there are four directions of wind in the world.

Later, we will get into those details. For now are addressing the very first roots of this topic. Let us think a little into this: what holy speech is and what evil speech is.

### ***The Inner Workings of Speech***

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Every time a person speaks, he is utilizing his aspect of *medaber*. Man is called *medaber* due to the *ruach* that is breathed into him. So *medaber* is rooted in *ruach*. Thus, our *dibbur* is what moves us.

We find that *dibbur* is always about *hanhagah*, leading. *Dibbur* is found whenever we move and ‘lead’ things. Thus, speaking holiness is when our *dibbur* is ‘led’ in a proper direction, and idle speech is when our *dibbur* is being led in the wrong direction – a misuse of the power of *hanhagah*.

When a person speaks, what is causing him to speak? The Vilna Gaon says that there are five sources of speech: *ratzon* (will), *machshavah* (thought of the mind) *hirhur* (thought of the heart), *kol* (voice), and *dibbur* (speech).

Here’s how we can see the five stages of our speech: When we talk, firstly, **1)** We want to speak, **2)** Then we think about what we will speak (as the Ramban says, think before you talk about what you will say; we are always thinking before we talk, but without awareness to this it is only done superficially), **3)** Then we think in our heart what we will say (*hirhur*) – there is thoughts in our heart too, as we find that Shlomo HaMelech said, “*I spoke with my heart*” – we consult with our heart before we speak. **4)** Then we let the words escape, which is our voice, **5)** And then the words come out (*dibbur*).

These five stages of speech are always present, whether we are consciously aware of it or not.

### ***The Depth Behind 'Devarim Betailim' (Idle Speech)***

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All speech begins in our *ratzon* (will). The word “*Moshe*” has the same *gematria* of *ratzon*. Chazal say that the “*Shechinah* spoke from his throat”, because he had the perfected *ratzon*, thus his speech was perfected with this.

Chazal say “to speak words of Torah, and not to speak *devarim betailim*”. It is possible that a person is speaking words of Torah yet his words are still on the level of *devarim betailim*, because one’s words are like *devarim betailim* as long as they lack awareness to the five stages of our speech. If speech is imperfect and missing any of these five levels, it is *devarim betailim*, from a deeper perspective.

Hashem made the world with the Ten Commandments. What is a word that is *bateil* (nullified) and a word that is not *bateil*? Hashem spoke to the world and created it from His speech. All of creation had a *dvar Hashem* (word of Hashem) which commanded it to become created. Usually we use speech only as a means to do something. But the Creator’s speech is that His speech itself creates. If something doesn’t come from speech, such speech is *bateil*.

How can a person speak? Because he is called “*medaber*”, because Hashem breathed into a man a *nefesh chayah* (a living spirit), a *ruach memalelah* (a talking spirit) – from the *dvar Hashem*. One must come to resemble Hashem. Therefore, the deep root of our speech is the *dvar Hashem* which enables our speech.

Our entire power to speak holiness is only when we recognize it as coming from the *dvar Hashem* that enables it. When one learns Torah and he speaks in it, the *Shechinah* learns with him, his *dibbur* is being nursed from the *dvar Hashem*. When a person speaks Torah, he is continuing the *dvar Hashem*. This is the *kol gadol v’lo yosaf* (the great voice, which did not stop) – one continues this endless voice of Hashem every time he speaks truth\Torah.

But when speech is not like this, it is speech without its root - *devarim betailim*. So *devarim betailim* is whenever speech has nothing to do with *dvar Hashem*. Surely when one speaks *lashon hora* or other evil kinds of speech, his words are worse *devarim betailim*.

If one’s words are beginning from oneself – meaning, he doesn’t connect it with Hashem as being the source of it - such words are *devarim betailim*, and they will not produce anything holy.

In deeper terms, Chazal say that “Hashem creates worlds and destroyed them”. Hashem makes His words into *devarim betailim*, so to speak. When one does not keep to his words, his words are *devarim betailim*. If one does not keep to his words, this is using the power of “Hashem destroys His own worlds that He creates” for evil.

### ***Elevating Our Speech***

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All of our speech must become connected with the speech of Hashem, its deep source. Hashem breathed into us from Himself, so our speech needs to become connected with its higher Root. In this way, the element of wind differs from the other three elements: it is the element which helps us find our higher root.

Thus, the first deep clarification one needs about his speech is to see how it is rooted in Above. If one cannot find how it is rooted in Above, it is called *devarim betailim*. Even if a person is not speaking anything idle, if he can’t find its higher root, it is *devarim betailim*. Evil speech is only the branches of idle speech. The root is to speak words that are not connected with *dvar Hashem*. That is the definition of *devarim betailim*.

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The first time in the Torah it mentions *ruach* is that there was “*ruach Elokim merachefes al pnei hamayim*” (“the spirit of G-d hovered above the face of the water”). So all *ruach* in us is wrapped in the *Ruach Elokim* on top of it. When one is holy and he is connected with Hashem, this is called *hisdavkus ruacha b’ruacha* (the spirit connection).

When Hashem split the waters, there were “upper” and “lower” waters. There is also higher and lower wind in man. But all *ruach* comes from one *ruach*: the *ruach Elokim* that is above lower *ruach*. If *ruach* is not connected with *Ruach Elokim*, it is not connected with its higher source and it becomes evil.

Why don’t the other elements move? What causes wind to move? It is because all wind wants to connect itself with the higher *Ruach* above it: the *Ruach Elokim*.

A person has *bechirah* (free will) how he will use his *ruach* to move upwards to Hashem or downwards towards sin. Lower *ruach*, ideally, is supposed to yearn to connect itself to its higher source, *Ruach Elokim*. All our speech is ideally supposed to connect ourselves to the *Ruach Elokim*.

When one doesn’t recognize this as the source of his *ruach*, when he doesn’t understand where his *ruach* comes from (and one must also become familiar with the five stages of *ruach*, as explained above), his *ruach* is not connected with *Ruach Elokim*, and his speech will be on a level of *devarim betailim*. When one understands what his *ruach*\speech is, his *ruach* will yearn to become connected with its higher source.

The Gemara (Yoma 77a) says that *devarim betailim* causes one to be thirsty. If so, why do we get thirsty even when we learn Torah? It is because when wind is not directed upwards to its source, the wind can fall to the level of water, where it becomes thirst\water.

As long as *ruach* is connected to its source, one wants to yearn for Hashem as he speaks. If this yearning is missing, his *ruach* will fall to the lower elements. Even one who always learns Torah and never interrupts his learning can still be affected by *devarim betailim* if his speech is missing its root.

We mentioned the words of the Vilna Gaon that there are five stages which speech passes through. The source of speech is the will. When one speaks and he does not want to do the will of Hashem, he speaks from his own human will, and he will want to praise himself, the evil trait of bragging, because he is speaking from his ego and not from his higher root. His speech begins in his fifth stage, not in his first stage.

Even if he speaks Torah, his words are only superficial – they are from a “tainted heart” (*tin’ah b’lev*), as the Gemara says about Doeg and Achitofel, that their Torah was ruined because they had a “tainted” heart.

If one wants to reveal holy *ruach*, he must know these five stages of speech and become aware of them, of where he is speaking from. If not, it’s possible that all that he speaks is not true. If speech is just viewed as merely “speech” and nothing more, then a person won’t understand this concept.

For example, if you say there’s a table in the room, ask yourself if you’re speaking from your own will or because Hashem enabled you to say this. It’s true that you wanted to say there’s a table here. But speech doesn’t come from you, it comes from Hashem. One needs to connect all of his speech with its deep root that enables it: Hashem’s word.

Everything in the world is called *dovor*, “thing.” Why? It is because everything is sustained by the *dvar Hashem*. If one cannot see how each thing is *dvar Hashem*, to him, everything is a *doimem* (non-living thing), to him, not a *dovor*. But if one sees everything as *dvar Hashem*, he sees each thing as a *dovor*. You can say this with your mouth but the question is if you really have that mentality.



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Chazal state, “Nullify your will, in deference to His will”. Don’t just see objects in front of you – see it as a *dvar Hashem*. But more than this, one needs to see how each thing is sustained by the *ratzon* of Hashem.

*Ratzon* is the root of all *dibbur*. One has to clarify how his *ruach* has the five stages. Otherwise, he has *ketzar ruach* (“short of breath”). One who is impatient to understand the root of his speech, has *ketzar ruach*, therefore he is quick to speak. The people who didn’t want to listen to Moshe had “*ketzar ruach*”.

This is a great power. When two people speak, are you hearing what he is telling you, or what he wants? If one only hears words, he hears *devarim betailim*. He does not hear the *ratzon* behind the words.

When the *bnei Yisrael* heard at Har Sinai, they heard the *ratzon* of Hashem, not just His words. That is why they said *Naaseh V’Nishmah*. Thus they had no *yetzer hora* then, because all of their speech was connected with *ratzon*, with *ratzon Hashem*.

This is the depth behind exodus: they went from *kotzer ruach* to the level of *shemias haratzon* (hearing the will of Hashem). Every word that came from Moshe was from his *ratzon*, not just from his *ratzon*, but the *ratzon* of Hashem that spoke from the *ratzon* of Moshe. So when one speaks, he can realize that his will to speak begins with the will of Hashem.

Thus, the evil side to wind is *devarim betailim*, and this has four branches of evil speech. The holy side to wind is to speak words of Torah, as Chazal state, that one should not speak mundane words on *Shabbos*.

### ***Awareness To Our Speech***

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All speech must therefore be analyzed: From where is it coming from in myself? There are five sources of where it can be coming from, as we mentioned.

This does not just mean to ask yourself if you are a lie or not. It is to realize from which point in yourself the speech is coming from. When one is aware of where he speaks from in himself (and he reminds himself that all speech comes from Hashem), he will speak more truthfully, and his *ruach* will become more connected with the *ruach* Hashem.

In order to do this, one must recognize what the element of wind is, to see its holy and evil uses, and through, that he will come to the “pure heart Hashem created me with, and a proper *ruach* (spirit) He renews in me” – the kind of *ruach* that can return one to Hashem and connect Him totally to the *Ruach* of Hashem.

## 070 | *Leitzanus* - Mockery

### *The Trait of Mockery (Leitzanus)*

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The element of wind, which is the root of idle speech, is the source for the traits of *chanufah* (flattery), *sheker* (falsity), *lashon hora* (gossip), and *mesaper b'shevach atzmo*, (bragging).

The fourth trait which stems from the element of wind, *mesaper b'shevach atzmo* (bragging), consists of two parts, as Rav Chaim Vital writes: “*mesaper b'shevach atzmo*” (one who brags of his praises), “*v'hagdalas atzmo*” (one who makes himself appear bigger).

The Gemara<sup>281</sup> describes four groups who will not merit the *Shechinah*: people who regularly engage in flattery, people who regularly speak gossip, people who regularly lie, and people who engage in mockery. The fourth group, those who engage in mockery, are called “*kat leitzanim*”, the “group of scoffers”, referring to the trait of “*leitzanus*” - mockery. The Gemara here has listed the traits of falsity, flattery, gossip, which are all traits that stem from the element of wind; and the fourth trait mentioned with this grouping is *leitzanus*\mockery. This seems to imply that the fourth trait which stems from wind is *leitzanus*\mockery, and not *mesaper b'shevach atzmo*\bragging of one's praises.

Rav Chaim Vital says, however, that the fourth trait which stems from wind is called “*mesaper b'shevach atzmo*” (bragging of one's praises), which seems to leave the trait of *leitzanus*\mockery out of the picture. However, upon deeper analysis, we can see that *leitzanus*\mockery is included in the trait of “*mesaper b'shevach atzmo*”, as follows.

When describing the trait of “*mesaper b'shevach atzmo*”, Rav Chaim Vital adds on that this includes “*hagdalas atzmo*”, “making oneself bigger”. This is referring to a trait in which one makes himself “higher”, in order to put down others. This is a use of the power of *leitzanus*\mockery: when a person makes himself to appear bigger than other, he is essentially nullifying the importance of others. This is what lies behind the attitude of *leitzanus*\mockery.

The traits of *leitzanus* (mockery) and *mesaper b'shevach atzmo* (bragging of one's own praises) are different ways of feeling higher than others. In the case of *mesaper b'shevach atzmo*, a person brags of his praises, in order to make himself appear higher, bigger, and greater than others. *Leitzanus*, however, is aimed at making others lower in his eyes, and as a result, the person feels higher than others.

(First we will discuss the trait of *leitzanus*, and later we will explain the trait of *mesaper b'shevach atzmo*.)

### *The Root of Leitzanus\Mockery*

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The root of *leitzanus* is first found in the Torah with the Serpent. Hashem told Adam and Chavah that they should not eat from the *Eitz HaDaas*, telling them that if they eat from the *Eitz HaDaas*, they will know Him, and He forbade this to them. Rashi says that when the Serpent told Chavah to eat from the tree, it told her, “A craftsman hates his competitor. Hashem hates people, and that is why He doesn't want them to become like Him”.

In this act, the Sages define the Serpent as being the epitome of evil *leitzanus*. Its intention was to lower the status of Hashem in the world and to equate Hashem with being on the level of people. That was the *leitzanus* of the Snake, and it was *leitzanus* at its most evil level.

The Serpent was cursed with, “*gechoncha teilech*” – it cannot walk anymore as it used to, and now it must slither and move around on its throat, in order to get places. The root of these words is the word “*gichuch*” – which means to be made fun of. Its punishment was measure-for-measure in trying to mock Hashem.

What is the essence of *leitzanus*? What is its root, and how does it work?

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### ***Leitzanus: A ‘Wind’ That Comes To Lower The Status of Things***

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We already have explained how *leitzanus*\mockery comes from the element of wind. The word “*leitzanus*” is related to the word “*mislotzet*”, which means to remove something from where it is, by lowering it. Thus, the idea behind *leitzanus* is that it is trying to lower something from a higher place and bring it down. When *leitzanus* is trying to bring something down, it is essentially trying to bring it down to the lowest of the elements, which is the earth.

Rabbeinu Yonah, in *Shaarei Teshuvah*, when listing the offenses of the various negative character traits, brings two different verses in the Torah that describe the *letz* (the scoffer). One verse describes a “*letz*” with the term “*zeid*” (rebellious), and another verse describes the “*letz*” as “*yahir*” (haughty). Thus, *leitzanus* consists of two aspects: *zeid*\rebelliousness, and *yahir*\haughtiness.

Earlier, when we learned about the element of water, we explained how the term *zeid*\*zadon* (rebelliousness) is a trait rooted in the element of water. The term *yahir* (haughtiness) is a trait that stems from *gaavah* (conceit), which is rooted in the element of fire.<sup>282</sup> Thus, it follows that *letz*\*leitzanus*, which is rooted in the element of wind, is a trait that takes the elements of fire and water and “lowers” them. To where does it “lower” them to? It lowers them to the lowest of the elements - which is the element of earth.

The Zohar says that *leitzanus* is linked with the trait of “*sechok*”, laughter. “*Sechok*” is connected with the spleen; the Gemara says that “the spleen laughs.”<sup>283</sup> *Sechok* is rooted in the term “*amah sochakas*”, which is linked with “*amah atzuvah*”<sup>284</sup>, a hint to “*atzvus*” (sadness). What is the connection between *leitzanus*\mockery, *sechok*\laughter, and *atzvus*\sadness? The trait of *leitzanus* brings something down from the level of wind down to the level of earth, which is the root of the trait of *atzvus*.

There is a rule that in each of the elements, we can find all the other four. So in wind, there also the four elements of earth, water, wind and fire contained in wind. The trait of *chanufah*\flattery stems from the “water” aspect in wind<sup>285</sup>, the trait of *sheker*\falsity stems from fire-of-wind, the trait of *lashon hora*\gossip stems from “wind”-of-wind, and the trait of *leitzanus*\mockery stems from “earth”-of-wind. These are the four groups of people mentioned in the Gemara who do not merit greeting the *Shechinah*: the group of “flatterers”, the group of “liars”, the group of “gossipers”, and the group of “scoffers”.

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<sup>282</sup> Refer to *Understanding Your Middos #089 – Fire - Conceit*

<sup>283</sup> *Berachos 61a*

<sup>284</sup> Refer to *Understanding Your Middos #006 – Earth - Limits*

<sup>285</sup> See *Fixing Your Wind - chapters 05, 06, 07, and 08*

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Why *leitzanus*\mockery stem from the “earth” aspect of wind? As we have explained, mockery is a form of ‘wind’ which lowers something to the ‘earth’. Thus, *leitzanus*\mockery is the “earth” of wind. To summarize thus far, *leitzanus*\mockery is a trait which lowers something from a higher level (wind\air) to a lower level (earth). On a more subtle note, it reveals the ‘earth’ aspect in the ‘wind’, and through that it lowers the status of the wind and brings it down to the level of the earth.

### ***Leitzanus Is Mainly Manifest In Devarim Betailim (Idle Speech)***

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*Leitzanus*\mockery is mainly connected with “*devarim betailim*”, idle speech<sup>286</sup>. The group of “scoffers” is mentioned together with the groups of people who speak gossip and falsity, which are traits that stem from idle speech. Therefore, *leitzanus* mainly gets its strength from the power of *dibbur*\speech. On a deeper note, *leitzanus* is to have “*hislotzezus*” (jest) out of the very words themselves. *Leitzanus* can be expressed in many forms, whether in writing or in any other ways, but it is mainly expressed via the means of speech. As we have explained earlier, this is because *leitzanus* is a wind that brings things down to the level of earth. Wind is *ruach*, which hints to *ruach memalelah*, “a talking spirit”, which refers to the trait of speech in man. When a person speaks words of *leitzanus*, he is lowering speech (wind) to the level of earth.

This is also why a person can also express *leitzanus* just with laughing in jest of someone, which is called evil *sechok*, laughter. When a person laughs, he is only using his mouth, and there are no words coming out of his mouth. The very laughter of his mouth takes the power of speech and lowers it from its higher level, down to the spleen - the root of *sechok*, lowly laughter.

### ***Leitzanus Attacks The Movements of Creation***

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So far, we have seen how the power of *leitzanus* is manifest in the area of speech. Where else can it be manifest?

The element of wind is described by the Sages in three general levels. It is described in terms of the four directions, and in its higher use it is known as *Ruach HaKodesh*. It is also called “*avir*”, air. So the element of wind can either be called *ruach* or *avir*. We find that the concept of *leitzanus* can be manifest both in *ruach*\wind and in *avir*\air; we will explain this.

Wind is essentially the movement in Creation. Of the four elements in Creation, the main force of movement is wind. Fire and water can also move, and from a subtle understanding even earth can have movement. But the main moving force in Creation is wind. *Leitzanus* takes movement itself and it “makes fun” of it. Earlier we explained how *leitzanus* pokes fun at speech; for this reason, *leitzanus* attacks all of the words of our history, including all of the words of the Torah. That is one of its evils. Now we are analyzing a deeper aspect of its evil: it attacks the very movement itself of Creation. This is the depth of the evil of *leitzanus*.

### ***Leitzanus Attacks Spiritual Light***

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<sup>286</sup> Refer to *Understanding Your Middos #066 – Wind – The Root of Speech*

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That is all with regards to the “*ruach*” aspect. But there is also the aspect of “*avir*”, air, which is contained in wind, as follows.

The word “*avir*”, אַויר, stands for the words *obr yud*, אור י', “the light of ten”, alluding to the Ten Commandments that brought spiritual light (*obr*) to the world. The word *letz*, לץ, has the same letters as the word *tzeil*, צל, which means “shadow” – the antithesis to *obr* light. What does *leitzanus* do? It places a “shadow” on the spiritual light and that is how it “makes fun” of the spiritual light. When something is bright and illuminating and it is clear, there is no way to make *leitzanus* out of it and to question its clarity, because it is shining so clearly that nothing can deny it. How does *leitzanus* take hold? When the light is obscured, through a *hester* (concealment). When there is concealment placed on spiritual light, that enables *leitzanus* to take hold and belittle the light.

We have so far explained two manifestations of the concept of *leitzanus* – with regards to *ruach* \wind\movement, where it belittles the very movements of Creation; and with regards to *avir* \*obr yud* \spiritual light, where it belittles spiritual light, by darkening it and concealing it, and through that it “makes fun” of the spiritual.

The *leitzanus* that belittles the spiritual is countered by the *mitzvah* of Sukkos, which is called “*tzila d'mehumenusa*”, “in the shade of faith”. When we sit in the *sukkah*, we sit within the “shade” of the glory (*kavod*) of Hashem, which counters the evil of *leitzanus*. The festival of Sukkos is also parallel to Yaakov Avinu, who is the symbol of holy *daas*; the power of *daas* on the side of evil is possessed by Amalek, who is the epitome of *leitzanus*, for of Amalek it is said, וד יהיר לץ שמו, “*A rebellious, arrogant one; a scoffer is his name.*”

Altogether, we have learned about three manifestations of *leitzanus* thus far. There is *leitzanus* with regards to *devarim betailim* \idle speech, which belittles the “*ruach*” aspect of wind; there is *leitzanus* which attacks the very movements of Creation; and there is *leitzanus* which belittles spiritual light. This is the general description of what we have described so far.

### ***The Root of The Leitzanus of the Serpent: The “Tzelem Elokim” of Man***

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We mentioned earlier that the root of *leitzanus* is found by the Serpent, who convinced Adam and Chavah to eat from the *Eitz HaDaas* by telling them that Hashem is afraid that they will become like Him. It told them, “*You will become like G-d*”, if you eat from the *Eitz HaDaas*. What was it trying to do? It was trying to lower G-d into the lower realms. That is the idea of *leitzanus* – it is trying to lower holiness, by trying to lower the level of the spiritual into the mundane. What is the earlier root of the *leitzanus* of the Serpent?

When Hashem created man, He created man *b'tzelem elokim*, “in the likeness of G-d”. The word *tzelem* contains the letters ז and ל, which has the same letters as the word לץ. Thus, *leitzanus* draws its power from the concept of the *tzelem elokim*, the very fact that man is created to be “*in the likeness of G-d*”.

The Serpent erred in thinking that man could actually “become like G-d”, because it drew a parallel with the *tzelem elokim* concept. If not for the *tzelem elokim* concept, the Serpent would never have been able to make such a mistake and think that man could really become like G-d. *Leitzanus* is therefore coming to make fun of the holy “likeness” that man bears towards G-d. If there would be no resemblance of G-d in man, there would be no source for *leitzanus* to thrive upon. The very fact that man bears a resemblance to G-d shows that there is some kind of resemblance, which is the *tzelem elokim* aspect of man.

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*Leitzanus* attacked man using the very *tzelem elokim* aspect of man. The word לץ is the word צלם (*tzelem*) without the letter נ, because *leitzanus* removes the נ and lets the letters ל and צ remain, lowering the higher letter to the lower when instead of raising the lower to the higher.

Thus, the *tzelem elokim* aspect of man allows for the root of *leitzanus* to take hold. If not for the *tzelem elokim* aspect, the Serpent wouldn't have had been able to explain to Adam and Chavah that Hashem feels competition with them.

The Torah is called "*melitzah*", a similar term to the word *moshol* (parable), and the Torah is called "*zeh sefer Toldos Adam*", and the deeper reason behind this connection is because sin man is created with a *tzelem elokim*, and the Torah is contained in man, for this reason, the Torah is called *melitzah*, from the word *tzelem*. This is also the root of the concept of "*moshol*" (parable). The *tzelem elokim* of man is all a *moshol* to the higher *tzelem*. Thus, the Torah is called *moshol* and *melitzah*, because it is all a *moshol* to the higher *tzelem*, of which Hashem created man with a *tzelem elokim*; the Torah is, so to speak, a resemblance of the higher *tzelem*.

*Leitzanus* is therefore connected with the *tzelem* of man, and it also is connected with the "*melitzah*" aspect contained in Torah.

### ***Words of Leitzanus – The Antithesis To Words of Torah***

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The Sages say that "For every word of *leitzanus* that enters the heart of man, accordingly, a word of Torah leaves him". The depth of this is because the Torah is the complete opposite of *leitzanus*. Earlier we mentioned the kinds of *leitzanus* which attack speech, movement and spiritual light. All of these aspects are in the Torah. The Torah is the root of all speech, for Hashem spoke from it to create the world. The Torah keeps the world moving, so it is the root of movement. The Torah is the root of all spiritual light. *Leitzanus* comes to attack of all these three aspects.

When Amalek attacked us after we grew weak in Torah, it was essentially the *leitzanus* of Amalek that came to attack these three aspects of speech, movement, and spiritual illumination, which caused us to become weak in Torah.

### ***A Deeper Look At The Leitzanus of the Serpent***

The Sages say that when Avraham bore Yitzchak, Hashem made Yitzchok look like his father Avraham, so that the "scuffers of the generation" shouldn't say that Sarah gave birth to Yitzchok after being abducted by Avimelech. Similarly, Hashem made Kalev the son of Dovid HaMelech look like his father, so that the people wouldn't say that he was born from a union between his mother Avigayil and her deceased husband Naval.

We will analyze deeper the "scuffers of the generation" in the times of Avraham and Avimelech, who were claiming that Yitzchok came from Avimelech and not from Avraham. They were specifically attacking the root of his birth. What is the depth behind this?

When the Serpent told Adam and Chavah that they could become like G-d, the Midrash explains that it was saying, "Just as G-d creates universes, so can you create universes." What was its argument? How could man become a creator? It is because man can bear children. The fact that man can continue his existence with children is a

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resemblance of being a creator, and that was its argument to them that they could become like a creator and continue to create universes.

We find that *leitzanus* is when there is *kalus rosh* (lightheadedness) that attacks *koived rosh*. When there is no *koived rosh*, there is no place for *leitzanus* to attack. *Leitzanus* only attacks something that has *koived rosh* to begin with. Avimelech spied on Yitzchok and he saw that there was *kalus rosh* between them, and we learn from this that *kalus rosh* is necessary in order to bear children. Thus, every birth is susceptible to *leitzanus*, because it is rooted in a subtle form of *leitzanus*, of *kalus rosh*. That is the depth of why the scoffers of the generation in Avraham's times were able to scoff at the source of Yitzchok's birth.

Now we can understand better what the agenda of the Serpent was, and the depth of its *leitzanus*. The simple understanding of its *leitzanus* was that it wanted to lower the status of spiritual, by lowering the status of Hashem onto the level of this lower world. But the depth of its *leitzanus* is that it was saying that "you can become like G-d" – it argued that since man has the power of birth to bear children, he is like a creator; and birth requires *kalus rosh*, so it was connecting *kalus rosh* with the Creator.

The Serpent's *leitzanus* is essentially its argument of "Just as G-d can create universes, so can you create universes". That is the depth of *leitzanus*. Thus, *leitzanus* does not just come to attack certain aspects in Creation. It can do that too, but there is a much broader evil which the force of *leitzanus* aims to accomplish [as seen from the Serpent's agenda]. It attacks the general whole of Creation, attacking it on a core level, arguing that man is on a par with G-d, with the argument that he is capable of continuation and "creating" children.

### ***Why It Is Permissible To Make Fun of Idol Worship***

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*Leitzanus* is also the root of idol worship, of having "other gods". To have "other gods" is rooted in the Serpent's argument that "you can be like G-d". The Gemara says that it is permissible to make fun of idol worship, and the depth of this is because the entire root of idol worship begins from *leitzanus*, and therefore, we make fun of idol worship because its very existence leads towards its belittling.

So far, we have explained that there are three forms of *leitzanus*: when it attacks speech, when it attacks movements, and when it comes to attack spiritual light. In all of them, the common denominator is that there is a broader agenda of *leitzanus*: it is attacking the very existence of Creation.

### ***Two Kinds of Leitzanus: Before Something Is Actualized, and After It Exists***

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The Gemara says that every generation has scoffers as in the generation of Dovid HaMelech, who ridiculed him that he had lost his rights to build the *Beis HaMikdash*. Elsewhere, the Gemara says that the generation of Yirmiyahu was a generation of scoffers. What connects these two generations together?

In the generation of Yirmiyahu, the book of Eichah was written, which describes the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*. The generation of Dovid made fun of Dovid because he wanted to build it and he did not end up building it. Yirmiyahu lived after it was built and destroyed. Dovid lived when it had the potential to be built. Both of them had a connection to the *Beis HaMikdash* – Dovid, through wanting to build it, and Yirmiyahu, who saw its destruction.

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The *leitzanus* in the generation of Dovid was to make fun of something before it appears. The generation of Yirmiyahu, however, shows us of what *leitzanus* leads to. These are two points about *leitzanus*: its inner root, and what it leads to.

*Leitzanus* leads the lowering of something, as we explained earlier. *Leitzanus* takes something after it exists and then it belittles its existence. That is what *leitzanus* leads to, but what is its root? It attacks the very existence of something, attacking it before it can become actualized from its potential state.

That is the very root of *leitzanus*: it says that something should only remain in its potential and not be actualized. The scoffers in the time of Yirmiyahu were belittling the Beis HaMikdash after it existed, which is the outcome of *leitzanus*. But the root *leitzanus* began in the generation of Dovid, where the scoffers then were saying that it will never be built; they were attacking it before it was even actualized.

### ***Holy Leitzanus: Returning Something To Its Root***

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The Maharal explains that the role of the earth is to bring the other elements from their potential state and to actualize its potential. This is the positive and holy use of earth<sup>287</sup>. Earlier we defined the simple meaning of evil *leitzanus* an act which lowers something from a higher level down to a lower level, where it lowers something all the way down to the lowest element, earth. But herein lays the holy use of *leitzanus*.

Not only does *leitzanus* lower something to the level of the element of earth, but it also can return something to the earth at its root, to its potential state in the earth, before it is actualized.

The evil side to *leitzanus*, its lower use, which we have been explaining until now, is that it causes a *tzeil* (a shadow) upon spiritual light; it darkens and conceals the spiritual, and it lowers things from their status. But there is also a higher and holy aspect to *leitzanus*: it returns something to its root.

There is an ongoing war against Amalek, and on a deeper level, it is really a war to return the world to its root. Simply speaking, there is a war between the nation of Amalek and the nation of Yisrael, but there is more to it. Hashem will fight Amalek in the end of days, using the very *leitzanus* of Amalek, in order to return to creation to its root. It will not simply be a way of “erasing” Amalek as it is simply understood. Rather, Amalek’s very power of *leitzanus* will be used against him in order to return everything back into its root.

When *leitzanus* is used in speech, a person falls from his level, from wind to earth, through speaking idle speech. This is evil *leitzanus*, the lower side to *leitzanus*. But at its holy root, *leitzanus* causes everything to be returned to its one holy root. Speech at its holy root is returned to the “*ruach memalelah*” which man is given. This is the holy *leitzanus*.

When *leitzanus* is directed at movement of Creation, the result is movement without a purpose. If a person is moving without a purpose, this causes people to laugh, which is an example of evil *sechok* laughter, which is a parallel with evil *leitzanus*.

### ***Movement Without A Purpose – The Depth of Evil Leitzanus***

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<sup>287</sup> see also the Hagahos Maharitz to Nefesh HaChaim shaar aleph, for more on this concept



Now we can understand deeply in terms of our soul, that any movements which we perform without a purpose are really a subtle form of *leitzanus*.

When a person performs movements for evil purposes, that is a different problem, which can either be jealousy, desire, or honor. But the person is still doing it for some purpose. But when a person is doing something with no purpose, this stems from *leitzanus*. This is like when Esav said, “*I am going to die, of what use is the firstborn?*” This is *leitzanus* in movement: it takes movement and leads it to a place of no purpose. When there is no purpose to a movement, that movement is *leitzanus*.

This is also the depth of why Amalek will have an “end”, whereas the other nations will be allowed to continue. It means that the other nations will eventually reach the purpose of Creation, whereas Amalek will have an “end”, their movements will have no purpose to them, and this is the *leitzanus* of Amalek. The *leitzanus* of Amalek causes them to have movement for no purpose, and this will lead towards their very end.

But the holy side to *leitzanus* is that it causes a return of Creation to its root – which is above movement. It returns everything to the spiritual light, the *ohr*, which is above all *tenuah* movement.

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***Hatzalah – Being Saved From The Tzel\Shadow of Concealment***

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So far, we have explained about *leitzanus* directed at speech and at movement. Now we will discuss the third manifestation of *leitzanus*, which is when it is directed at belittling spiritual light, *ohr*.

The word *letz* has the same letters as the word *tzel* (shadow) – it is the “shadow” of light; it conceals light. The word *letz*\tzel is from the word *hatzalah* (to save). All *hatzalah* is essentially a *hatzalah* from *tzel*\shadow\concealment. Whenever we “save” something, we are really “saving” it from *tzel*, from concealment of light. This is because when spiritual light is fully revealed, there is no evil that can take hold there, and when the light is concealed, there can be evil there.<sup>288</sup>

When spiritual light is removed - this is *leitzanus*. When there is *hatzalah*, a person is saved from the *tzel*. When there is *hatzalah*, it saves something from *tzel*\concealment and instead returns it to “*melitzah*” – the light that is contained in the Torah, which counters *leitzanus*. This is also the meaning of the term “*Maatzil Ha'Elyon*”, an aspect of one of the names of Hashem.

The Gemara says that the gentiles in the future will want reward for *sukkah*, but Hashem will remove the sun from its sheath, and then they will kick at it. The depth of this is because the gentiles do not want to illuminate the shade of the *sukkah* with the light of the *Maatzil Ha'Elyon*. The gentiles will kick the *sukkah* because they don't have the illumination of *ohr* light within *tzei*\shadow. The gentiles either have sun\light or shadow\darkness, but they are not able to shine the light within the shadows. They don't have the Torah which is called “*melitzah*”, which can return shadow to light.

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***Rectifying Leitzanus: Filling The Emptiness of Creation With G-dly Light***

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<sup>288</sup> This is explained by the Ramchal in *Daas Tevunos*

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The *Mishnah* in *Avos* says that if two people are sitting together and they are not discussing Torah, it is a “*moishav leitzim*”, a group of scoffers. It is understandable that they are a *moishav leitzim* if they are talking idle speech, but what is wrong is they just sit together quietly and they don't say anything? Why is this called a *moishav leitzim*?

It is because the Torah is called “*melitzah*”, the light that can return everything to its source, and if two people are sitting together and they are not discussing Torah, it shows that they are unaware that the Torah contains “*melitzah*”. If they do not reveal *melitzah* together, they are left instead with the opposite of *melitzah*, which is *tsel* (shadow\concealment) - the root of evil *leitzaanus*. With no Torah between them, there is nothing but empty space between them, which is called *revach*, or *chalal*, which refers to the *chalal hapanyu*, “the empty space in Creation”, which is also the evil side to the element of wind (for wind is *ruach*, from the word *revach*\space).

If they would talk words of Torah together, there would be *melitzah* between them, and it would shine spiritual light within the empty air between them. But if there are no words of Torah between them when they sit together, it is a *moishav leitzim*, for they are in a *chalal hapanyu* (empty space). but if they have Torah between them, there is *melitzah*, there is *hatzalah*.

Chazal say that if a man and woman are worthy, they merit the *Shechinah* between them; if they are not worthy, a fire consumes them. The fire consuming them is the beginning of their punishment, and their end is that they are destroyed - meaning, they return to the earth in that state; they are lowered to the “earth”. All *leitzaanus* necessitates a middle point which is empty, where all ruination can then occur; everything there can become lowered to the earth. If the middle point becomes filled with spiritual light, with *Shechinah*, they receive the opposite of *leitzaanus*, which is called the “*tzila d'mehemenusa*”, “in the shade of faith.”

Thus, holy *leitzaanus* is when a person reveals the complete G-dly light throughout creation. Evil *leitzaanus*, as we explained, attacks the very existence of Creation, in the areas of speech, movement, and spiritual light. Holy *leitzaanus* is about shining the light of G-dliness within “shadow”, in the places where spiritual light is concealed - in the lowliest places.

This is the meaning of the verse, “*Then our mouths will be filled with laughter*”. In contrast to the “scoffers of the generation” which were in the times of Avimelech, there is a holy laughter that stems from the “*melitzah*” aspect in the Torah. The Torah is called “*melitzah*” because it shines the Source of the light, which is called “the *me'ohr* of the *tsel*”, and then the *tsel*\shadow becomes illuminated by the light. That is the holy *sechok*\laughter which will fill our mouths in the future – when darkness becomes filled with light, when concealment becomes illuminated, that will be reason for us to have the holy laughter which we will have from this.

This will reveal the complete G-dly light in all of Creation, and this is the secret of how the Torah is called “*melitzah*”, which will show how there are no *devarim betailim* (idle speech), but the upkeep of existence in Creation, and this will be the *melitzah* which rectifies all *devarim betailim*.



**089 | Fire – Conceit*****The Element of Fire And Its Middos/Traits***

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We will now begin to study the element of fire in our soul.<sup>289</sup>

Fire is hot and dry. The heat in fire is what makes fire bear a connection with the element of wind, which is warm; the dryness of fire makes it related to earth, which is dry. Fire is the opposing force to water, which is cold and moist – water is thus the total opposite of fire, which is hot and dry.

The *middos*<sup>290</sup> which result from the element of fire, as Rav Chaim Vital writes, are: gaavah (conceit) and ka'as (anger). These are the two root *middos* which stem from fire, and they have three branching *middos*: hakpadah (grudges), serarah (seeking control), kavod (seeking honor), and sinah (hatred).

Hakpadah/grudges are a branch of anger, while serarah/control and kavod/honor are branches of gaavah/arrogance. The trait of sinah/hatred branches out from both gaavah/conceit and ka'as/anger. These are the *middos* which all branch out from the element of fire in the soul. The root *middos* of fire are gaavah/conceit and kaas/anger.

We will begin by examining the trait of gaavah/conceit.

***Gaavah/Conceit Can Be Used For Good or Evil***

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As we have mentioned, every middah can be used for either good or evil, so there can be evil conceit (gaavah d'kilkul), or holy conceit (gaavah d'kedushah).

The concept of gaavah d'kedushah/holy conceit is that a person must feel elevated in his heart when he serves Hashem, as it is written, “And his heart was high in the ways of Hashem.” The constructive and holy kind of gaavah is when a person is aware of his elevated status as a Jew and this encourages him to serve Hashem better. Also, we find that Hashem also makes use of holy gaavah – Hashem “wears gaavah” as a garment; this is the root of holy gaavah.

***Fire: A Wish To Rise From One's Current Level***

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What is the concept of gaavah all about? Since gaavah comes from fire, let us examine the nature of fire, which contains several nuances. The main aspects in fire are its heat and its dryness, but it also has some other aspects to its

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<sup>289</sup> This chapter is an esoteric understanding of the “element of fire” in the soul, the root of the trait of gaavah Conceit. For a simpler and more practical approach in understanding “conceit” and how to rectify this trait in oneself, refer to the Rav's series of *Fixing Your Fire*.

<sup>290</sup> character traits

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nature: fire rises, it can destroy, it can spread, and it has some other natures as well which we will hopefully elaborate upon later, with the help of Hashem.

To begin, we will focus on the first aspect of fire, which is that it naturally rises. This is called aliyah/ascension.

Fire is a flame, a *shalheves*, and a flame naturally rises by itself. Thus, fire in the soul causes in a person a wish to rise above others. When a person feels lower than where he should be, he may wish to rise higher above where he is.

### *Two Kinds of Rising – “Gei’ah” and “Yuhara”*

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Gaavah is sometimes termed “gei’ah” and it is sometimes called “yuhara”.

It is called gei’ah when a person simply wants to rise higher above his current level; this is the nature of fire to simply rise, which is called aliyah (ascension).

It is called yuhara when a person wants to rise in relation to someone else. The word “yuhara” comes from the word “ohr”, light, because yuhara is when a person wants to rise above another person’s ohr/light; he becomes aware of another person’s high spiritual level, another person’s ohr/spiritual light, and burns with a desire to go above the other person’s ohr. This kind of gaavah is not coming from the aspect of aliyah/ascension in fire, and it is rather coming from a different aspect of fire, he’arah, which means “light.”

Thus, gaavah can either be stemming from the aspect of aliyah/ascension in fire, which is called gei’ah, or it can be coming from the aspect of he’arah/light in fire, which is called yuhara.

### *Wishing To Be On A Higher Level Vs. Seeking Transcendence*

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In the nature of fire to rise, there are a few aspects in this to examine.

Fire, wind and water are the three active elements. It is brought in our *sefarim hakedoshim* that the three active elements are parallel to the three main parts of the body – the head, the stomach, and the geviyah (the torso). The head is parallel to fire, the stomach to water, and the torso to wind.

Gaavah is about wanting to go from a lower point to a higher point. If a person is at a lower level and he wants to rise to the higher level because he wants to get to the higher level, this is holy gaavah. The focus here is on the fact that a person wants the higher level.

But if a person’s desire to rise to a higher level is mainly because he wants to be above the point where he is now, this is how we identify it as the evil kind of gaavah.

The Vilna Gaon writes that holy gaavah is when a person wants to get to a higher level, because he desires his root, which is represented by the head, the highest point of the body; it is a yearning of the soul to return to its root, because everything in Creation has a desire to go back to its root. But if a person wants to rise to a place that is not really for him to be in – and this is represented by the point above the head, which is the hair - this is the evil kind of gaavah.

***Three Sources For Wishing To Go Higher: In The Liver, In The Heart, or Simply Conceit!***

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There are two sources in the body where gaavah can stem from and cause in a person a wish to go higher. Gaavah can start either in the liver, or in the heart.

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When gaavah starts in the liver, it is when a person wants to rise higher than his current level and simply be higher. The other kind of gaavah, which starts in the heart, is called gas ruach, (haughty of spirit). The Rokeiach writes that the Ruach of our soul (which contains our emotions) resides in the heart, and it wants to rise higher from the heart. The wish to rise can also be coming simply from the nature of gaavah, whether it is in the liver or in the heart.

Thus, there are three kinds of gaavah. A person might want to rise higher from his current level (which is gaavah of the liver), or he might wish to rise because of the Ruach in his heart which wants to rise above its normal level, which is gas ruach; or it can be coming from the nature of gaavah itself, which is the desire to rise.

### *Evil Conceit: Esav, Hair, and Transcendence*

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When a person has evil gaavah, he wants to rise higher above his current level, but it is not a holy aspiration; rather, he wants to transcend the human limitations and be above it. Instead of wishing to rise to the “head” of the body, which is the highest point in his reach – he wants to rise above the head; he wants to transcend even the highest level, because his motivation is not about spiritual perfection and returning to his root state, and it is rather a wish for transcendence. Such gaavah is an ambition to go above the body, above the head – which the hair. We will explain why this is evil.

The hair represents Edom (Esav), who was born hairy. Hair is called saar, which is related to the word sar (overseer), a hint to the overseer of Edom (sar shel Edom) which wants to rise above all people, one of the main evil forces of impurity that exist. Esav is called ish sair, “man of Seir”, which can also be read as “man of hair”, because he wants to get to the hair – he represents a haughty ambition in a person to go above the highest point so that he can be above everyone else. This wish to rise is evil, for he does not want to get to his own highest point, which is his head; rather, he wants to go higher so that he can be higher than all other people. The hair is above the head, and Esav wants to get to the “hair”, not just the head – he wants to be above a person; he wants to be above all people. This agenda, Esav’s agenda, represents the evil kind of gaavah that can exist in all people.

Esav is also called an evil kind of “fire” (and Yishmael is the evil kind of “water”). But Esav doesn’t want to simply rise due to his dominant fire. He wants to go above the head - not just to rise to the head. He wants to be above human limits; he does not seek human perfection; he does not have a desire to return to his root, and he wishes instead to go above the root, where he will feel exalted and glorified. That is the way how gaavah (with regards to its aspect of the wish to rise) is used for evil.

The Mishnah in Avos states that Avshalom, the son of Dovid HaMelech who rebelled against his father, was conceited through his hair, and therefore he was punished through his hair [his long hair got him tangled in the trees and killed him]. The evil gaavah that he had resembles the gaavah of Esav, a desire to aim for the “hair”, a desire be above human limits – represented by his affinity for hair.

### *Gaavah Stemming From The Liver: Inner Heaviness*

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When evil gaavah is coming from the liver, it is a desire to go above one's current level, and not because the person wants to simply be on a higher level than where he is now. Rather, he wants to rise above his current level because he has an agenda of haughtiness.

This kind of gaavah is referred to by *Chazal* in the admonishment to a person to not to walk poised upright. Such a person's walking is slow and heavy, carefully planned [so that onlookers will stop to be in awe of him; he has this agenda of getting others to notice his self-proclaimed prominence]. This is the kind of gaavah which stems from the liver. It is gaavah from the viewpoint of a person's current level, because he is currently at a lower level, and he wants to be above it, when in reality, he is not on the higher level.

The gaavah which stems from the liver is a gaavah stemming from a lower point. In this kind of a gaavah, a person will perform slow, heavy, and carefully planned movements so that he can make others aware of his importance. Although he is performing movements, his movements are not coming from the nature of movement in the soul, and they are rather coming from inner heaviness that he has developed in his soul, which is called kavaid, heaviness. The liver is called the kaveid, which is related to the word kaveid/heavy.

### ***Gaavah Stemming From The Heart: The Desire For Transcendence***

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The second kind of gaavah we discussed is called gas ruach (when is when a person's Ruach wants to rise from his heart and go to the head). This is when a person wants to go above his ideal level – he wants to transcend human limits. The Ruach, which is present in one's heart, might wish to go above where it is and go to the head. When this happens, the nature of the trait of gaavah itself, which has now become activated in the person, will take this wish even further and it will want to rise even above the head is the desire to go above the head.

When this desire in a person is channeled towards holiness, it is the desire in a person to wish to return to his root, which is the Creator. The rule is that everything in Creation yearns to return to its root; our soul yearns to return to its creator, which is the Creator. So when a person wishes he could rise above his level and go all the way to the highest point – his root where he came from, the Creator – this is the holy way to use the gaavah that stems from the heart (as well as the trait of gaavah in general - with regards to aliyah, the wish to rise).

Now we will see how the desire for transcendence – when a person's gaavah seeks to go above his head – can be used for either good or evil.

*Chazal* say that if a person eats before davening, he is acting with gaavah, because he is taking care of his own needs before he has even gone to meet the King, Hashem. This is haughtiness on his part.

The *Gemara* says that Hashem cries in the inner domains of His heart, over the gaavah of the Jewish people that has been taken away and given to the non-Jewish nations, ever since the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash.<sup>291</sup>

As mentioned before, the word gaavah is from the word geviyah, which refers to the guf, the body. The kind of gaavah which comes from one's geviyah, his guf, is gaavah coming from the element of wind in the soul, for the element of wind is parallel to the geviyah [and water is parallel to the stomach, and fire is parallel to the head]. Thus, the element of wind is in the geviyah of the body, thus, gaavah is titled so from the word geviyah. When a person wants to rise above the guf /body and go the head, this is gaavah stemming from his element of wind [This can be used for either good or evil as we will see].

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<sup>291</sup> *Chagigah 5b*



## 223 Understanding the Essence of Your Middos

The Beis HaMikdash is called the “neck of Yisrael”. The neck is the connecting point between the head and the head. When gaavah is in the heart, it wants to go the head – how will it get there? Through the neck. The Beis HaMikdash represents the holy kind of this gaavah. It is called the gaavah of Hashem, and it is also called the gaavah of Yisrael, as we brought before from the *Gemara* [in Tractate Chagigah 5b].

### *Understanding Gaavah D’Kedushah*

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When a person in the times of the Beis HaMikdash would bring a korbán (sacrifice), he did so with a lev nishbar, “a broken heart”. He didn’t just have a lev nishbar – he had a ruach nishbar, he was “broken in spirit.” After bringing the korbán, he was uplifted; he felt his ruach soaring higher. So the korbán was, in its deeper essence, a way to go from one’s heart to his head, for holiness. The person started with a ruach nishbar and used his ruach to go higher. This was the holy kind of gaavah d’kedushah that begins in the heart and ascends to the head.

Gaavah stemming the liver is usually evil. Every evil power can also be used sometimes for good, but usually, it is used for evil. [So it is difficult for a person to use gaavah d’kedushah if the gaavah stems from the liver.] But if gaavah stems from the heart – when a person seeks to rise to his “head” from the geviyah/ruach that is in his heart, it can be used for either holiness or evil.

When a person has gaavah to rise to the “head”, it can often be a desire to really go above the head, which is the hair. This is like the story in the *Gemara* of the nazir who looked at his hair through the reflection in the river and realized that he was a baal gaavah because of his long hair. He had gaavah through his hair, and this is like the gaavah of Avshalom, who was haughty because of his long hair. The gaavah of Avshalom was the kind of gaavah in which a person desires to go “above” the head. What is the root of this? It is written, “Wisdom lights up the face.” The chochmah/wisdom of a person is found on the face. The chochmah also surrounds the head. The *Gemara* says that there is flame above the head of a fetus. So when a person wants to ascend to above himself, this can be holy.

It is evil when a person wants to transcend his human limitations, and it is good when it is coming from the soul’s desire to connect to its root - which is above the soul. Fire wants to rise and connect to its root.

The *Gemara* says that the bigdei kehunah (the Kohen’s clothes) atones for different sins.<sup>292</sup> The mitznefes, the turban, atones for the sin of gaavah. The mitznefes is above the head, by the hair, thus, it atoned for the kind of gaavah which seeks to rise above the head, which stems from fire itself. It atones for the very root of gaavah, which is the desire to rise above the head – the gaavah that Esav and Avshalom had.

Mitznefes is from the word tzofeh, seer, which can also mean navi - to look and see higher. Thus, the mitznefes atoned for the root of evil gaavah, which is the desire to rise above the “head”, the desire for transcendence of human limits for non-spiritual motives.

Such gaavah, though, can be used for holiness when a person wants to rise above his soul and connect to his soul’s root – the Creator.

The *Gemara* says that there are four animals on the Maaseh Merkavah (the Holy Chariot) on Hashem’s Throne, and all of them are called ge’im, “conceited.” The lion, the eagle, etc. are all conceited kinds of animals. But they represent the holy kind of gaavah. Holy conceit is to connect to the source, Hashem, Who is above all gaavah, for Hashem is called “ge’oh gaah”, exalted above all. Since all of these animals are on Hashem’s Throne, it shows that

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<sup>292</sup> Zevachim 88b

their gaavah represents the desire to go above all to be able to connect to our Source, Hashem. Hashem has gaavah over all ge'im, and the meaning of this is, that Hashem is the root, above all. The holy gaavah of Hashem is the revelation of the truth - that He is above all.

Hashem cries on His inside, over the Jewish people who have been given over to the nations<sup>293</sup>. The depth of this is that Hashem is sad that our holy gaavah has been removed from us. Exile is a situation of Klal Yisrael is in a lowly state, for their holy gaavah has been taken away from them; meaning, they aren't connected to their root – to Hashem. The exile is that they have become lowered; their status of holy gaavah has been removed. Yehuda was lowered from his brothers – this hints to the root of exile, the lowering of Yehuda, the lowering of recognizing one's holy status as Jew.

Thus, gaavah d'kedushah is when a person wants to connect to his root – he wants to go above himself because he is longing to connect to his highest source, the Creator. When this desire in a person is misused, it becomes evil and it is merely a haughty desire in a person to transcend human limits.

The first time that gaavah is mentioned in Torah is when the letters of gimmel and aleph are combined, which by HaMalach HaGoel, the prophecy about the redemption which Yaakov blessed the sons of Yosef with. This shows us that gaavah is actually the root of geulah/redemption – holy gaavah, that is. The gaavah of Yisrael has been taken away and given to the non-Jews during exile, and this is what Hashem cries about. Thus, the geulah will essentially be a situation in which the true gaavah will be returned to the Jewish people – the recognition of our holy status, when we will be completely connected with our root: Hashem.

(Esav and Yaakov were called the two nations that fought in Rivkah's womb. Normally, there is a rule that Esav and Yaakov fight, for "Esav hates Yaakov", and they fought in the womb. But we also find that Rabbeinu HaKadosh and Antiochos were friends. This was the tikkun (rectification) of the pirud (disparity) that exists between Yaakov and Esav.)

The Beis HaMikdash is called the holy gaavah of Yisrael. But the first two temples were not yet the completed kind of holy gaavah, because they were within the exile, where our holy gaavah has been taken from us and given to the nations. We were supposed to come into *Eretz Yisrael* and have the future Beis HaMikdash, but because we sinned in the desert, we were destined for exile and we did not enter the Land with complete holiness. The true holy gaavah wasn't revealed yet, and it will only be revealed in the future Beis HaMikdash.

We have said that there are three kinds of gaavah. The gaavah of the Beis HaMikdash represents the holy way to use gaavah to rise above the head – the desire to connect to our root, which is above us: Hashem.

The Ohr HaChaim says that had Moshe built the Beis HaMikdash it would never have been able to be destroyed. The Mishkan he built was hidden, not destroyed.

The Beis HaMikdash represents the holy use of gaavah from the heart, of the ruach which resides in the heart, which wants to rise to the head, for a holy purpose.

The Beis HaMikdash was destroyed by fire, and it will be built with a fire. It will come down from Heaven in a fire. It will be the complete and holy gaavah of Yisrael, when "Hashem and Yisrael are one" - the gaavah of Hashem, the gaavah that is above man, will be unified with us. The third Beis HaMikdash represents the point that is above the head - the revelation of the true gaavah, which is the point above man's head.

*Holy Ga'avah – A Deep Humility*

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The opposite of gaavah is anavah, humility. The Torah says that Moshe was the humblest person in mankind. The Sages said that had Moshe built the Beis HaMikdash, it would have been forever; whereas the Beis Hamikdash that Dovid HaMelech built was destroyed. Let us understand now with greater depth.

The third Beis Hamikdash is rooted in the Mishkan<sup>294</sup> that Moshe built. This is due to the rule, “the end is contained in the beginning”. The third Beis HaMikdash will be the complete manifestation of holy gaavah, the “ge’oh gaah” of Hashem, for it will be the pride of Hashem. Thus, the depth of holy gaavah is, when anavah/humility is fused together with the holy gaavah.

Now we can understand the following deep point. The trait of gaavah is rooted in fire, which rises. Holy gaavah is not just about “rising” in a holy manner. It is also about lowering itself, which is anavah. These are two sides to the same coin: holy gaavah is about both rising and being lowered at once. It is written that “Hashem wears gaavah”, the “gaavah” of Hashem is called “levush” (garment), because sometimes Hashem “wears” gaavah and sometimes He “wears” anavah. Thus, holy gaavah really contains anavah.

Now we can understand the following. Earth tends to lower itself downward. Holy gaavah, which involves anavah/humility/lowering, is therefore connected with earth. Therefore, holy gaavah is what connects fire to all the other elements of the soul.

This will be the complete kind of holy gaavah: when it connects all of the soul’s elements together. The connection of fire and earth together is a result of the true and holy kind of gaavah.

When we merit the resurrection of the dead in the future, the dead will get up from the earth. Simply speaking, this means that they will be revived by dew, which is a form of the element of water. But the deeper understanding of this is that it is warmth which will awaken them, as we see that Elisha screamed at the dead to wake them up; this was a form of warmth/fire.

So it is the element of [holy] fire is what will ultimately fix the element of “earth” and thereby connect all the soul’s elements together.

This is the secret behind the concept of oneg (holy pleasure), which contains the letters ayin, gimmel, nun. The letter “ayin” represents anavah (humility) the letter “gimmel” represents gaavah, and the letter nun represents when things get turned around (we see this from how the letter nun in the Torah can be upside-down). In other words, when we turn around gaavah and we channel it to its holy direction, and when we turn around anavah (from lowliness to true humility), it is then revealed the true and complete level of holy gaavah, which is the true oneg/pleasure.

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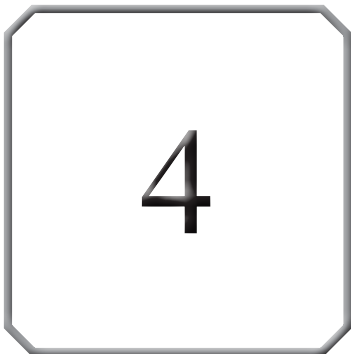
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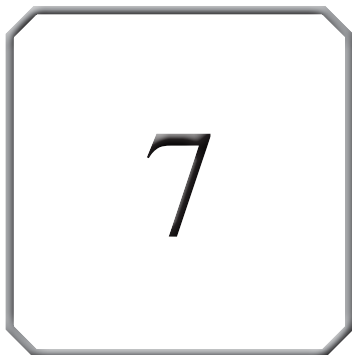
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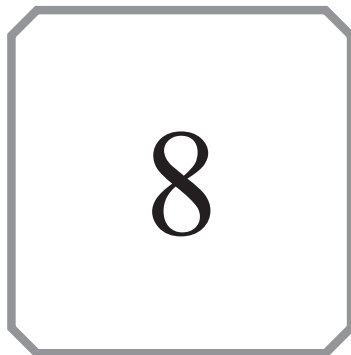
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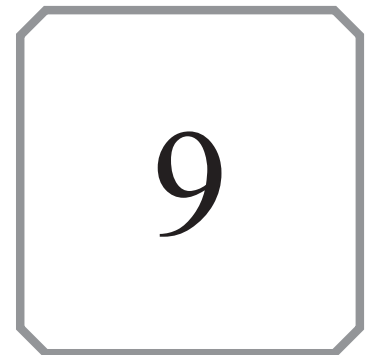
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